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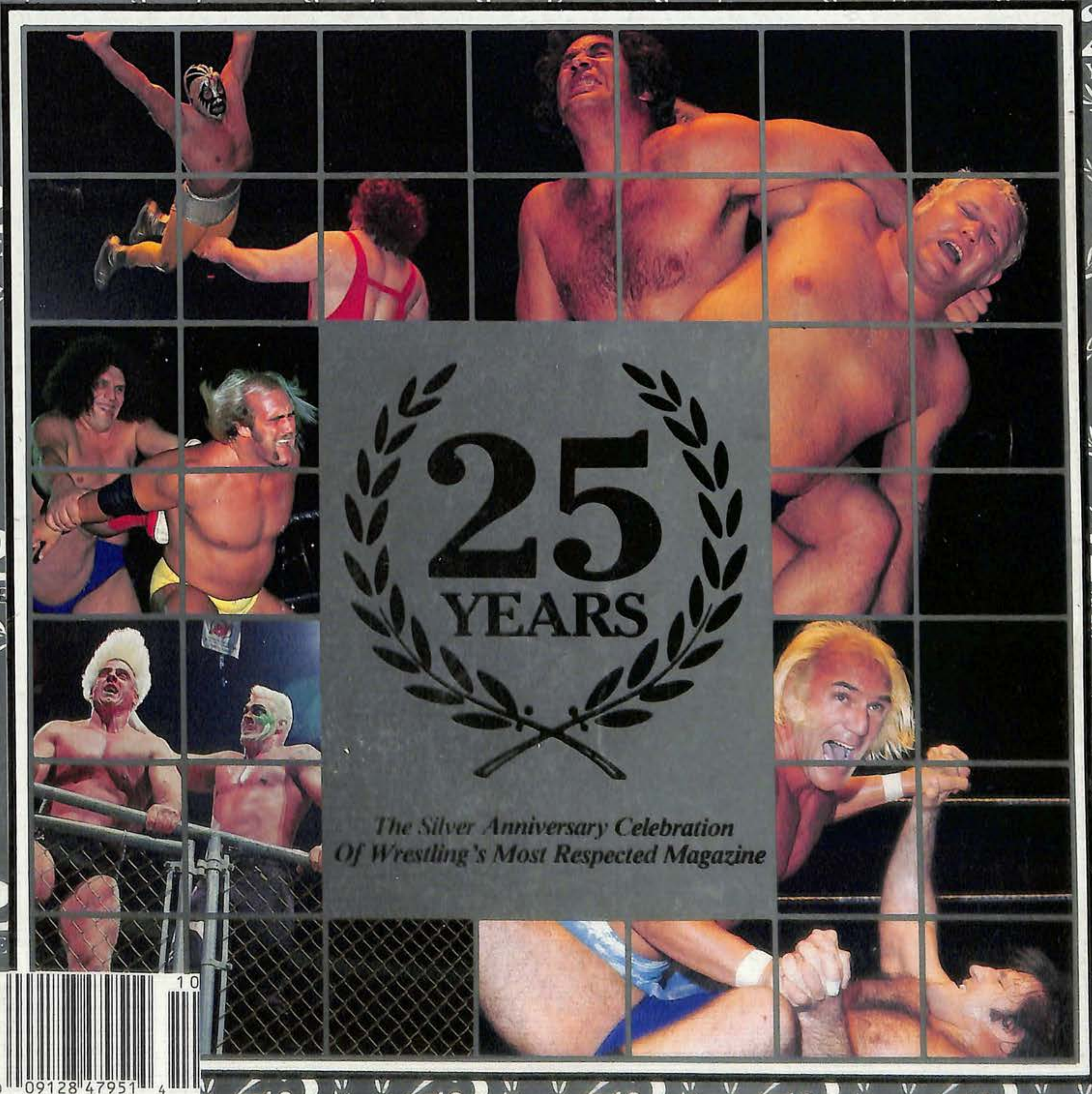

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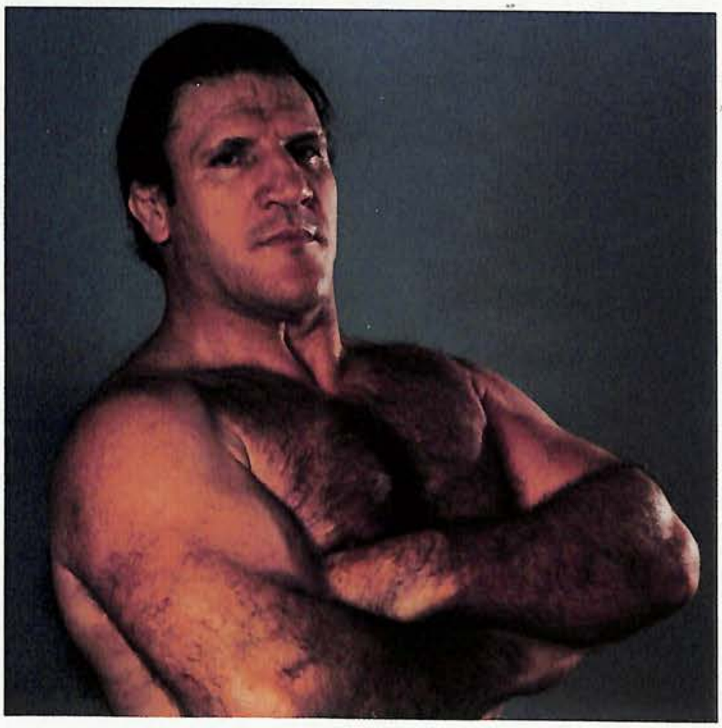

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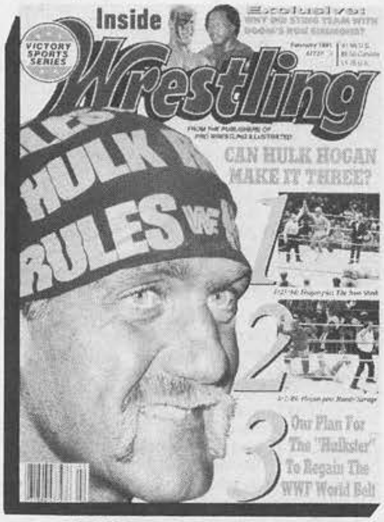

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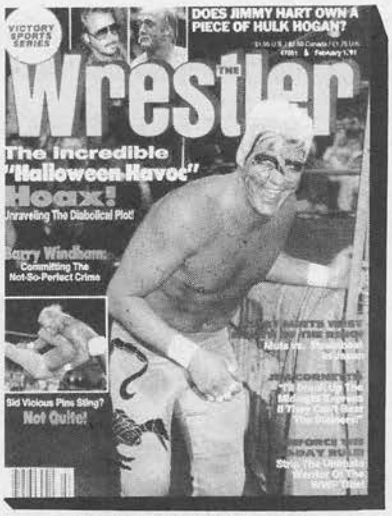

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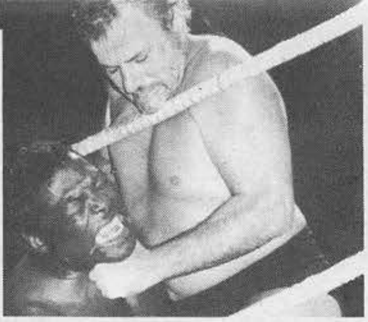
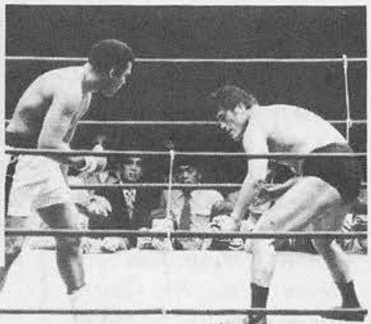
THE Wrestler

Bruno Sammartino butts heads with Joe Frazier.



In 1976, Bobo battled The Sheik (above) and Ali fought Inoki (below)—and *The Wrestler* was there.



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But you were also the one who got the most attention and undivided love. And you were the one whose complete childhood is recorded on film or videotape. And you're the one who always wore the new clothes, never the hand-me-downs.

You were the first. The original. You suffered for it, but—face it!—you also enjoyed it.

This month we are celebrating the 25th birthday of this publishing company's first-born. The first issue of *The Wrestler* was published in October 1966, and, for two years until the birth of its sister, *Inside Wrestling,* it was the only wrestling magazine published in the United States. Twenty-five years later, there are more sisters, a few cousins, and a few neighbors.

As the oldest, *The Wrestler* was a groundbreaker. It had to establish on its own just what a magazine devoted to the sport of professional wrestling should be. It didn't enjoy the luxury of having another magazine to pattern itself after and try to improve upon, but through the years, *The Wrestler* grew up quite well, thank you. Sure, there were disadvantages to being the first, but there were advantages, too. Like, for instance, being the only magazine in the world to go back to its own pages to chronicle all that has happened in this great sport for the last quarter-century.

Assembling the 25th anniversary edition of *The Wrestler* could be likened to transfering all your old home movies to videotape. It's an arduous task, but when you can finally sit back and enjoy, you know it was worthwhile.

We've done all the work; all you have to do is sit back and enjoy.

(Continued on page 74)

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Who was Hulk Hogan's first WWF manager?

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2) Arnold Skaaland
3) Jimmy Hart
4) Elizabeth

Which man was never a member of Paul Ellering's Legion of Doom?

1) Jake Roberts
2) Hawk
3) King Kong Bundy
4) Buzz Sawyer

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WHAT'S HAPPENING!

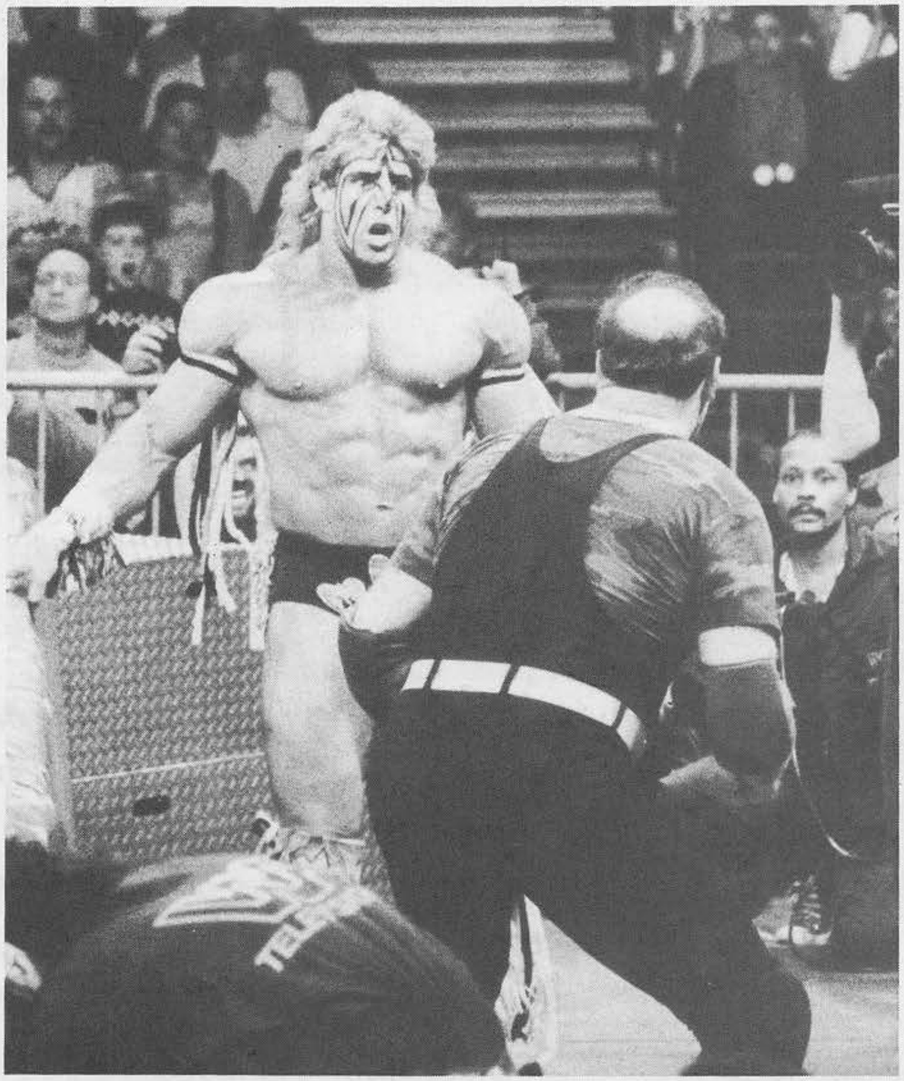
By BILL APTER

THE BOUT THAT'S being billed as "the match made in hell" will surely be a hot one, especially for WWF World champion **Hulk Hogan**. The main event of SummerSlam '91, to be held August 26 at Madison Square Garden in New York, will pit Hogan and **The Ultimate Warrior** against three men—**Sgt. Slaughter**, **Gen. Adnan**, and **Col. Mustafa**.

Hogan is taking quite a risk by signing for this match. Not only will he be facing the dangerous Slaughter and Slaughter's two henchmen, it is also not entirely clear how much he can depend on his own partner. It's long been known that Hogan and the Warrior, the man who defeated him for the WWF belt at WrestleMania VI, have never been on the best of terms.

In addition, this important match will be refereed by WWF newcomer **Sid Justice**, who established a long history of brutality wrestling under the name **Sid Vicious.** Many WWF officials are worried that Justice may already be coveting Hogan's World title.

"At first, everybody believed that Justice was trying to uphold



Ultimate Warrior and Sgt. Slaughter are scheduled to meet again at SummerSlam, where Warrior will team with Hulk Hogan and Slaughter will tag with Gen. Adnan and Col. Mustafa.

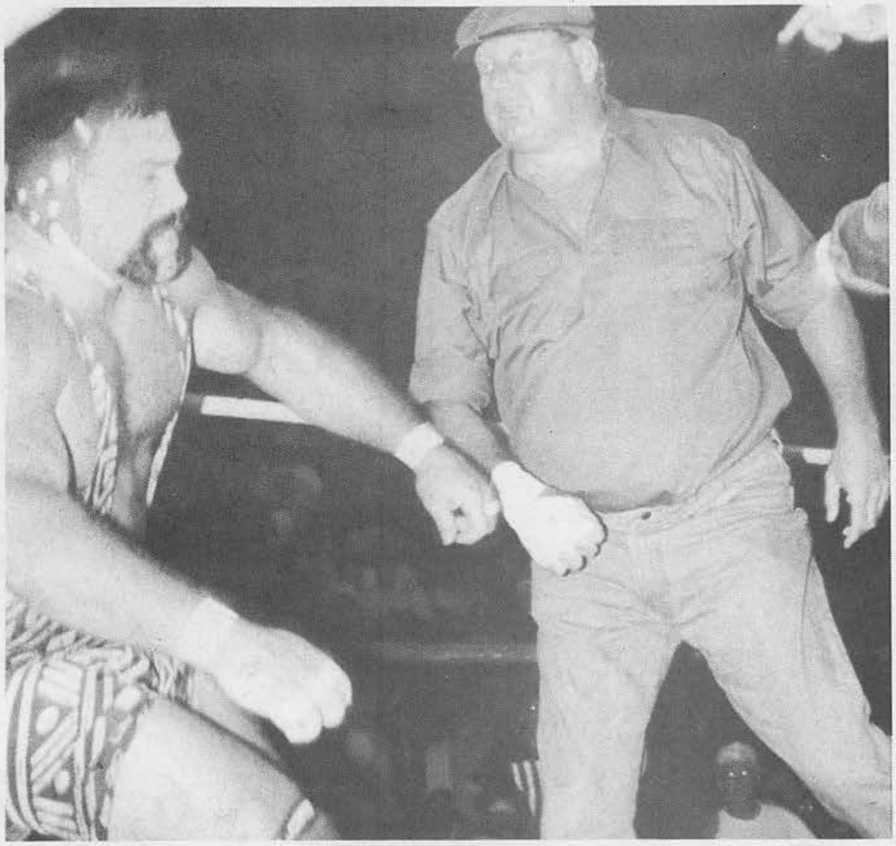
law and order in the WWF," said a federation source. "After all, he ran **The Mountie**, **Earthquake**, and **Ted DiBiase** from the ring when they made challenges. But Sid's conduct has confused just about everybody around here. He's been in the federation for about three months, but he hasn't wrestled at all. Nobody can figure out what his motivations are."

Justice's odd behavior hasn't prevented several managers—including **Coach John Tolos**, **Jimmy Hart**, and **Slick**—from making inquiries about his availability. In addition, wrestlers such as **Kerry Von Erich** and **Davey Boy Smith** have asked Justice to team with them, but Justice has reportedly turned everyone down.

Frankly, I'm worried about Hogan at this point. He seems confident going into this match, but it isn't above Justice to try to make a name for himself by trying to cripple Hogan—and SummerSlam seems like a perfect time and place for him to try to do it. No matter what happens, this is going to be one of the year's most important matches.

I'm also quite worried about **Rick Steiner**, who's carrying on all alone these days while his brother and partner, **Scott Steiner**, is out of action with a torn left bicep. Rick has targeted **Dick Murdoch** and **Dick Slater**, the men responsible for injuring Scott at Clash of the Champions XV on June 12 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Rick, whose left arm was also injured in that skirmish, now wants to take on both members of **The Hardline Collection Agency** at once!

"I can beat both those old-timers at once—with my good arm tied behind my back!" bellowed Rick, as manic as ever. "That's right. I'll put the WCW World tag team title on the line, too. Those two slobs are gonna pay for what they did to Scotty, and I can get the job done by myself!"



Hardliner Dick Murdoch is hot after Rick Steiner, especially now that Rick has lost his partner and brother Scott to a severe bicep injury, courtesy of The Hardliners.

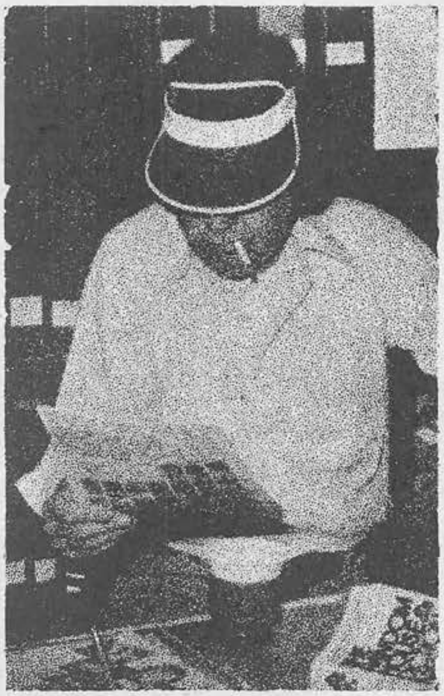
WCW officials, however, aren't about to allow Rick to defend the organization's most prestigious tag team title on his own.

"We're going to have to come up with a way for Rick to defend the World title," said WCW official **Grizzly Smith**. "Perhaps he can face *one* of the Hardliners, with the winner to get the title, or we'll allow him to pick another partner.

(Continued on page 72)

STEVE ANDERSON'S VIEW

MATT BROCK'S



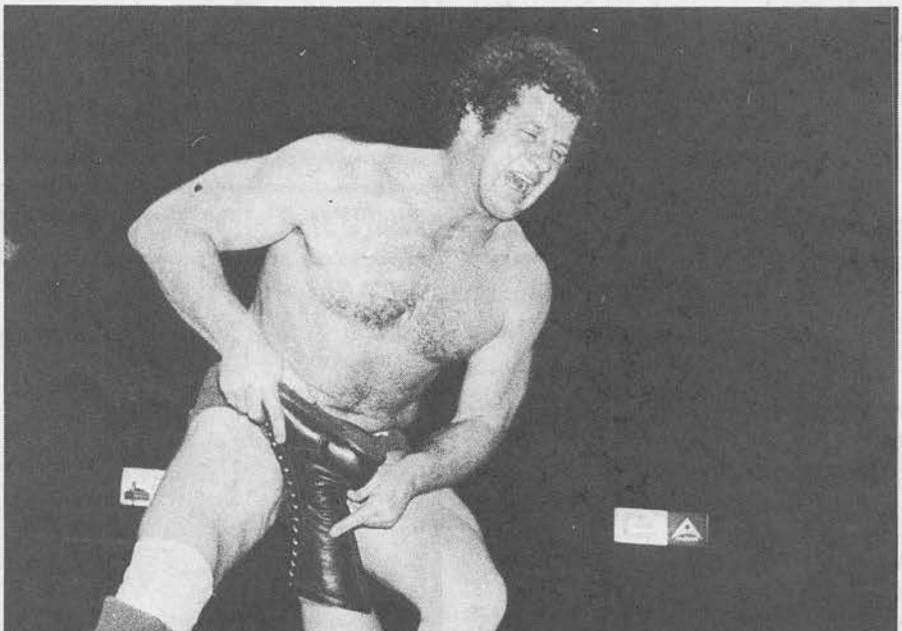
LOOKING BACK

February 6, 1977
HARLEY RACE vs. TERRY FUNK

LIKE I'VE ALWAYS said, I like men who are *men.* Not pretty boys. Not poseurs. Just hard-working pro *wrestlers.* I go back to the days when arenas were smoke-filled palaces of action, where men locked in mortal combat over championships. Today's stars seem too concerned with matters such as marketing contracts, valets, mascots, and other bogus pursuits. Who cares?

Needless to say, I agree with everything Bruno Sammartino told Bill Apter in the "Q & A" in this issue. That's why I was so overwhelmingly pleased when Craig Peters, editor-in-chief of *The Wrestler*, selected me to pick what I felt was the finest match to occur during the years this magazine has been published.

Frankly, I'm a little surprised they asked me to do this. After all, I surely wasn't going to pick a match involving most of today's superstars—except, perhaps, Ric Flair or Rick Steamboat (in his pre-"Dragon" days), and maybe Jerry Lawler or Sting. I admire the men who provide action when they get

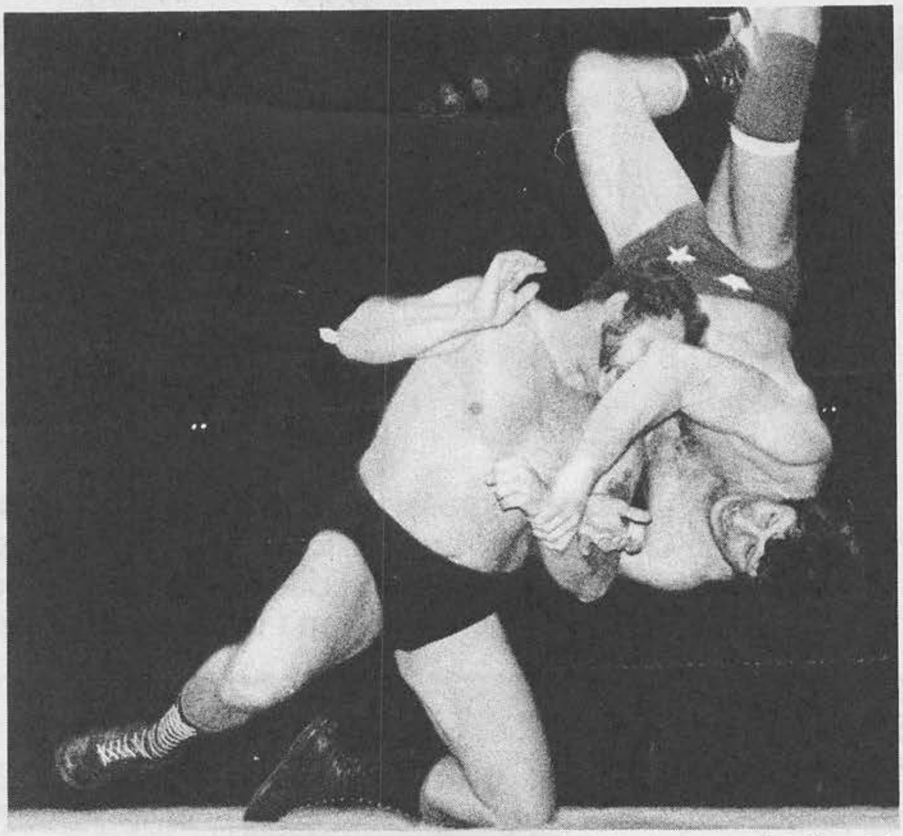


Terry Funk gives Harley Race a spinning toehold. Matt Brock calls this bout, in which Race regained the NWA World title, the greatest match of the *Wrestler* years.

in the ring and leave the frills to the ladies at ringside.

Of course, there have been many *important* matches that weren't great. When WWF World champion Hulk Hogan took on Andre the Giant at WrestleMania III, it was a classic *confrontation*, but the actual wrestling itself was not much. On the other hand, the Flair-Steamboat feud was the greatest *series* of bouts I've ever seen. See—I'm *not* stuck in a '50s time warp!

But overall, the greatest match I've seen during the quarter-century of *The Wrestler* made me proud to be a journalist covering this sport. There was no music played as the competitors made their way to the ring. As I recall, neither combatant in the main event even wore so much as a ring jacket. And when the bell sounded, there was nothing but action for 14:10 that I wished had lasted forever.



The Race-Funk tussle only lasted about 14 minutes. Brock's only regret was that the match didn't last longer.

And if they never wrestled another match, both Harley Race and Terry Funk would *still* be all-time greats based on their incredible NWA World championship match at Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens. For Funk, it was the end of his only title reign, and for Race it was the beginning of his second of seven. Neither of these men—who currently combine for a whopping 58 years of experience—ever wrestled a better bout.

Funk was never more vicious than he was during this period in his career. He had barely managed to keep his belt from challengers Jose Lothario and Jack Brisco, and Race had been a persistent thorn in his side. For Race, it had been four years since he lost the NWA belt to Jack Brisco, and he was getting tired of hearing that he didn't have it anymore (Race over the hill in *1977*—what a laugh!).

At about the seven-minute mark, Funk was beating on Race so badly that it looked as if the Kansas City native would quit at any second. Terry caught Race in a vicious backbreaker, then applied what I call a "Fred Blassie" neckbreaker, followed by a kneedrop to the face. The crowd (including yours truly) was shocked when Race kicked out of Funk's pin attempt.

Frustrated by his inability to score the pin, Funk started battering Race with fists and chops. But "Terrible" Terry had used up so much energy pounding on Harley that soon he was as weakened as Race was. Race slowly made his way to his feet and rocked Funk with headbutts, followed by his trademark kneedrop to the forehead.

Race smashed Funk in a backbreaker of his own, but it wasn't nearly enough to score a pin on the cagey Texan. Race tried the same move again, but Funk brought his legs up, scissored Harley's head, and brought him down to the mat in perfect position for a pin; a confused Race barely kicked out. To this day, I still don't know how Terry came up with that beautiful move. A true game of human chess, as Gordon Solie likes to say.

Moments later, Funk caught Race in his spinning toehold, and Harley flailed about the canvas in sheer pain. When Funk spun around to increase the pressure, Race was barely able to kick Funk off.

Then came Funk's fatal mistake. For some reason, Funk grabbed Harley in a headlock in a strategy I've never been able to figure out. While locked in the hold, Race lifted Funk up over his shoulders and brought him crashing down to the mat. Terry seriously twisted his right knee upon impact.

Instantly, Race applied his Indian deathlock, nearly destroying Funk's kneecap then and there. Terry screamed in pain, but he refused to give up . . . 30 seconds passed . . . 45 seconds . . . then, after almost a full minute had elapsed, Funk could take no more. Referee Fred Atkins called for the bell, and Race was the new NWA World champion. The fans responded with a standing ovation.

Even after all that great action, what I liked best about this match was the reaction of those amazing Canadian fans. There was no good guy or bad guy in this match. But when the match was over, the fans knew they had seen a pure, classic representation of wrestling greatness.

My only wish is that someday, somehow, someone duplicates it. □

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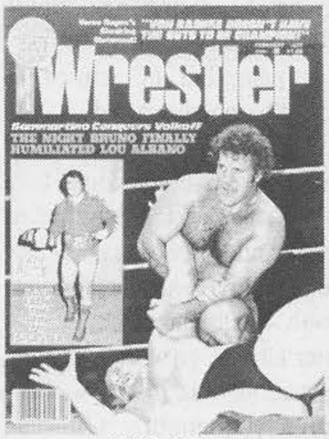

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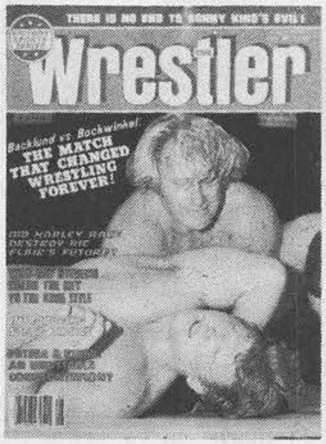
December 1979/Stories include: Andre, Graham, Rhodes, Mascaras.

February 1980/Stories include: Andre, Flair, DiBiase, Superstar.



MARCH 1980

March 1980/Stories include: Sammartino, Murdoch, Mulligan, Andre.

April 1980/Stories include: Rhodes, DiBiase, Youngblood, Wrestling II.

May 1980/Stories include: Andre, Mascaras, Bockwinkel, Patera.

June 1980/Stories include: Backlund, Abdullah, Brisco, Flair.

August 1980/Stories include: Valentine, Zbyszko, Von Erich, Albano.

September 1980/Stories include: Ladd, Patera, Steamboat, Gagne.

October 1980/Stories include: Patera, Rhodes, Wrestling II, Morales.

January 1981/Stories include: Valentine, Rhodes, Patera, Von Erich.

February 1981/Stories include: Zbyszko, Patera, Iron Sheik, Wrestling II.

March 1981/Stories include: Rich, Samoans, Blassie, Wrestling II.

May 1981/Stories include: Backlund, Rhodes, DiBiase, Moondogs.

June 1981/Stories include: Sammartino, Piper, Rich, Martel.

July 1981/Stories include: Backlund, Rhodes, Flair, Atlas.

August 1981/Stories include: DiBiase, Slaughter, Martel, Idol.

October 1981/Stories include: Funks, Rhodes, Race, Sullivan.

January 1982/Stories include: Rich, Steamboat, Sullivan, Sammartino.

March 1982/Stories include: Slaughter, Albano, Flair, Race.

April 1982/Stories include: Brisco, Armstrongs, Valentine, Santana.

May 1982/Stories include: Backlund, Von Erich, Graham, Rich.

June 1982/Stories include: Steamboat, Reed, Albano, Piper.

July 1982/Stories include: Rich, Sawyer, Flair, Steamboat.

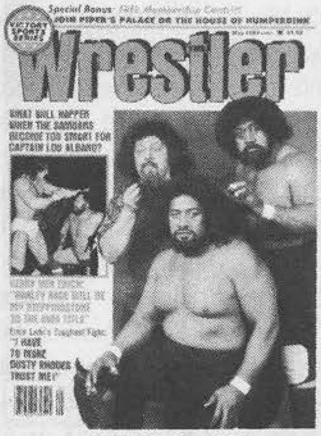
August 1982/Stories include: Bockwinkel, Steamboat, Mulligans, Piper.

September 1982/Stories include: Rhodes, Hogan, Armstrong, Blair.

October 1982/Stories include: Snuka, Rhodes, Santana, Piper.

November 1982/Stories include: Flair, Snuka, Piper, Blair.

December 1982/Stories include: Snuka, Rich, Kamala, Junkyard Dog.



JANUARY 1983

January 1983/Stories include: Putski, Muraco, Windham, Bockwinkel.

February 1983/Stories include: Bockwinkel, Backlund, Rich, Kamala.

April 1983/Stories include: Rhodes, Tiger Mask, Sammartino, Bundy.

May 1983/Stories include: Samoans, Von Erich, Rhodes, Orndorff.

June 1983/Stories include: Windham, Martel, Brody, Andre.

July 1983/Stories include: Flair, Adonis, Sullivan, Zbyszko.

August 1983/Stories include: Valentine, Blanchard, Windham, Street.

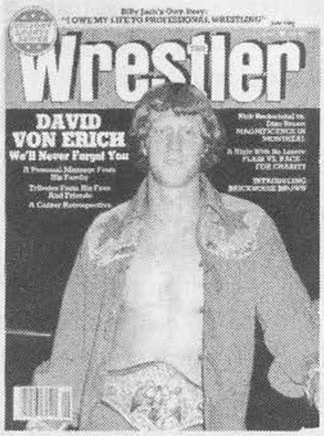
September 1983/Stories include: Hogan, Ellering, Von Erich, Briscos.

October 1983/Stories include: Race, Sawyer, Briscos, Bass.

November 1983/Stories include: Rhodes, Santana, Von Erichs, Kabuki.

December 1983/Stories include: Mascaras, Superstar, Von Erich, Zbyszko.

March 1984/Stories include: Santana, Hogan, Von Erich, Sawyers.



APRIL 1984

April 1984/Stories include: Hogan, Ellering, Von Erich, Rhodes.

May 1984/Stories include: Windham, Brody, Road Warriors, Junkyard Dog.

June 1984/Stories include: Von Erich, Billy Jack, Flair, Armstrong.

July 1984/Stories include: Rich, Billy Jack, Valiant, Von Erich.

August 1984/Stories include: Garvin, Sullivan, Freebirds, Street.

September 1984/Stories include: Von Erich, Piper, Steamboat, Billy Jack.

October 1984/Stories include: Flair, Rhodes, Magnum T.A., Bundy.

November 1984/Stories include: Billy Jack, Von Erich, Piper, Brody.

December 1984/Stories include: Martel, Santana, Von Erich, Steamboat.

January 1985/Stories include: Von Erich, Warriors, Albano, Koloffs.

February 1985/Stories include: Warriors, Santana, Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

March 1985/Stories include: Slaughter, Warriors, Martel, Rude.

April 1985/Stories include: Warriors, Von Erich-Adams, Flair, Tonga & Snuka.

May 1985/Stories include: Warriors. Backlund, Santana, Rich.

June 1985/Stories include: Rhodes, Windham, Rich, Hogan.

July 1985/Stories include: Junkyard Dog, Reed, Martel, Sunshine.

August 1985/BONUS COLOR SECTION! Plus: Warriors, Magnum T.A., Sheik & Volkoff, McGraw.

September 1985/Stories include: Hogan, Von Erich, Savage, R&R Express.

October 1985/Stories include: Flair, Windham, Shultz, Martel.

November 1985/Stories include: Hogan, Zbyszko, R&R Express, Von Erichs.

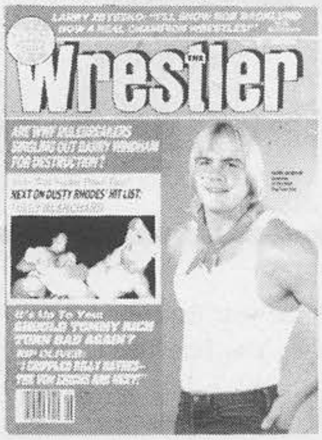
December 1985/Stories include: Rude, Fantastics, Muraco, Uncle Elmer.

January 1986/BONUS COLOR SECTION! Plus: Slaughter, Rich, Flair, Kerry.

February 1986/Stories include: Hogan, Orndorff, Flair, Hansen.

March 1986/Stories include: Von Erich, Duggan, Hansen-Martel.

April 1986/Stories include: Von Erich, Rude, Lugar, Hogan, Magnum T.A.



MAY 1986

May 1986/Stories include: Zbyszko, Von Erichs, Santana-Ventura, Hillbillies.

June 1986/Stories include: Lugar, Hernandez, Flair-Bockwinkel, Hogan, T.A.

July 1986/Stories include: King Kong Bundy, Koloff vs. Graham, Ric Flair.

August 1986/Stories include: Snuka, Bulldogs, Freebirds, Warriors, Duggan.

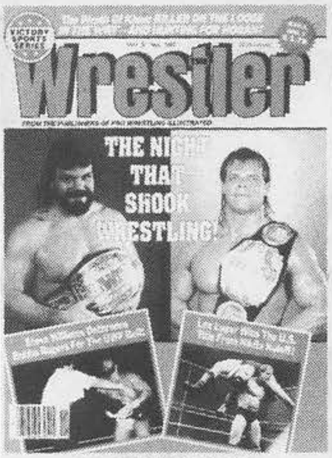
September 1986/Stories include: Fantastics, Adonis, Morton-Flair, Brody.

October 1986/Stories include: Nikita-Magnum, Nord, Bruno, Kerry, Windham.

November 1986/Stories include: R&R Express, Hogan-Orndorff, Von Erich.

December 1986/Stories include: Flair, Bockwinkel, Hogan, Gilbert, Nikita.

January 1987/Stories include: Heenan, Garvins, DiBiase, Borne & Sawyer.



FEBRUARY 1987

February 1987/Stories include: Magnum T.A., Gordy, Steamboat-Roberts.

March 1987/Stories include: Windham, Nikita, Adias, Savage-Steamboat.

April 1987/Stories include: Hogan, Luger, Rich-Lawler, R&R Express.

May 1987/Stories include: Flair-Nikita, Andre-Hogan, UWF, Windham, Hennig.

June 1987/Stories include: Flair-Windham, Can-Ams, Rhodes-Murdoch.

July 1987/Stories include: Cornette, Hyatt, Luger, Harts, Adams, Hansen.

August 1987/Stories include: Can-Ams, Luger vs. Nikita, Fantastics, Koko, Nord.

September 1987/Stories include: Koloffs, Harts, Duggan, Hennig, Hart.

October 1987/Stories include: Savage-Honky Tonk, Horsemen, Patera, Kerry.

November 1987/Stories include: Williams, Luger, Hogan-Khan, Rich.

December 1987/Stories include: Hogan, Windham, Lawler, Flair, Beefcake.

January 1988/Stories include: Nikita-Taylor, Warriors, DiBiase-Duggan.

February 1988/Stories include: Flair, Andre-Hogan, New Breed, Kerry.

March 1988/Stories include: Hogan, Luger-Sting, Calgary, Demolition.

April 1988/Stories include: Bonus 4-page color section! Starrcade, Survivor Series, World Class.

May 1988/Stories include: Horsemen, Hogan, Flair, Fantastics, DiBiase.

June 1988/Stories include: Sting-Flair, DiBiase, Kerry, Nikita, Zenk.

July 1988/Stories include: Fantastics, Hogan, Windham, McMahon, Rich.

August 1988/Stories include: Savage, Windham-Luger split, Demolition, Lawler, Ellering.

September 1988/Stories include: Duggan vs. Andre, Hogan, Windham.

October 1988/Stories include: Rhodes, Fantastics, Hennig, Roberts-Rude.

November 1988/Stories include: Midnight Ex., DiBiase, Bossman, Brody.

January 1989/Stories include: Kevin Von, Rougeaus, Horsemen, Hogan.

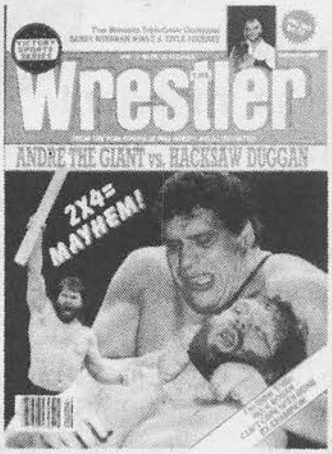
February 1989/Stories include: Warriors, Ultimate-Hogan, Bigelow-Gordy.

March 1989/Stories include: Jarrett, Flair, Jake-Andre, Bigelow-Windham.

April 1989/Stories include: Bulldogs, Warriors, Andre, Hogan-Savage.

May 1989/Stories include: Steamboat, Savage-Hogan, Dusty, Valentine.

June 1989/Stories include: Steamboat, Martel, Ultimate-Savage, Luger, Flair.



JULY 1989

July 1989/Stories include: Warrior, Hogan-Bravo, Flair-Steamboat, Rhodes.

September 1989/Stories include: Flair-Funk, Piper, Demolition, Zeus.

October 1989/Stories include: Hogan & Beefcake vs. Zeus & Savage, Hyatt, Hayes, Long, Embry, WWF Horsemen.

November 1989/Stories include: Piper-Savage-Hogan, Dusty, Flair-Funk.

December 1989/Stories include: Muta-Sting, Andre-Ultimate, Windham.

January 1990/Stories include: Pillman, Hogan, Rich-Luger, Tully & Arn.

February 1990/Stories include: Sting-Luger, Gordy, Martel, Hogan-Brown.

March 1990/Stories include: Steiners, Flair-Funk, Hogan-Zeus, Survivors.

April 1990/Stories include: Hogan, Luger, Woman, Piper-Heenan, Travis.

May 1990/Stories include: Sting & Ultimate, Bossman, Von Erichs, Hogan.

June 1990/Stories include: Hogan, Rockers, Koloffs, Horsemen, Flair-Luger.

July 1990/Stories include: Poffo, Dusty-Savage, Luger-Flair, Doom, Blanchard.

August 1990/Stories include: Hogan-Warrior, Embry, Demolition, Doom.

September 1990/Stories include: Ultimate, Haynes, Luger, Doom, Tugboat.

October 1990/Stories include: Hogan-Earthquake, Ultimate, Flair, Rich.

November 1990/Stories include: Luger & Sting, Beefcake, Race, Steiners.

December 1990/FULL-COLOR SummerSlam coverage. Plus: Warrior, Arn, Hansen, Slaughter, Memphis.

January 1991/Stories include: Survivor Series, Sting, Beefcake, Flair, Woman.

February 1991/Stories include: Sting-Vicious, Muta-Steamboat, Warrior, Hogan.

March 1991/Stories include: Hogan-Warrior, Piper, Cornette, Steiners.

April 1991/Stories include: Hogan, DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Luger, Zenk.

May 1991/Stories include: Hogan-Slaughter, Flair, Eaton, Sheik-Bobo.

June 1991/Stories include: Hogan, Nastys, Sting, Flair, Cactus Jack.

July 1991/Stories include: Flair-Fujinami, Nastys, Steiners, Savage.

August 1991/Stories include: Slaughter, Luger-Nikita, Hennig, Poffo.

☐ AUG 75	☐ APR 82	☐ JULY 85	☐ AUG 88
☐ DEC 75	☐ MAY 82	☐ AUG 85	☐ SEPT 88
☐ NOV 76	☐ JUNE 82	☐ SEPT 85	☐ OCT 88
☐ DEC 76	☐ JULY 82	☐ OCT 85	☐ NOV 88
☐ JAN 77	☐ AUG 82	☐ NOV 85	☐ JAN 89
☐ FEB 77	☐ SEPT 82	☐ DEC 85	☐ FEB 89
☐ APR 77	☐ OCT 82	☐ JAN 86	☐ MAR 89
☐ MAY 77	☐ NOV 82	☐ FEB 86	☐ APR 89
☐ JULY 77	☐ DEC 82	☐ MAR 86	☐ MAY 89
☐ NOV 77	☐ JAN 83	☐ APR 86	☐ JUNE 89
☐ OCT 78	☐ FEB 83	☐ MAY 86	☐ JULY 89
☐ NOV 78	☐ APR 83	☐ JUNE 86	☐ SEPT 89
☐ DEC 78	☐ MAY 83	☐ JULY 86	☐ OCT 89
☐ MAY 79	☐ JUNE 83	☐ AUG 86	☐ NOV 89
☐ JULY 79	☐ JULY 83	☐ SEPT 86	☐ DEC 89
☐ AUG 79	☐ AUG 83	☐ OCT 86	☐ JAN 90
☐ SEPT 79	☐ SEPT 83	☐ NOV 86	☐ FEB 90
☐ DEC 79	☐ OCT 83	☐ DEC 86	☐ MAR 90
☐ FEB 80	☐ NOV 83	☐ JAN 87	☐ APR 90
☐ MAR 80	☐ DEC 83	☐ FEB 87	☐ MAY 90
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☐ MAY 80	☐ APR 84	☐ APR 87	☐ JULY 90
☐ JUNE 80	☐ MAY 84	☐ MAY 87	☐ AUG 90
☐ AUG 80	☐ JUNE 84	☐ JUNE 87	☐ SEPT 90
☐ SEPT 80	☐ JULY 84	☐ JULY 87	☐ OCT 90
☐ OCT 80	☐ AUG 84	☐ AUG 87	☐ NOV 90
☐ JAN 81	☐ SEPT 84	☐ SEPT 87	☐ DEC 90
☐ FEB 81	☐ OCT 84	☐ OCT 87	☐ JAN 91
☐ MAR 81	☐ NOV 84	☐ NOV 87	☐ FEB 91
☐ MAY 81	☐ DEC 84	☐ DEC 87	☐ MAR 91
☐ JUNE 81	☐ JAN 85	☐ JAN 88	☐ APR 91
☐ JULY 81	☐ FEB 85	☐ FEB 88	☐ MAY 91
☐ AUG 81	☐ MAR 85	☐ MAR 88	☐ JUNE 91
☐ OCT 81	☐ APR 85	☐ MAY 88	☐ JULY 91
☐ JAN 82	☐ MAY 85	☐ JUNE 88	☐ AUG 91
☐ MAR 82	☐ JUNE 85	☐ JULY 88	

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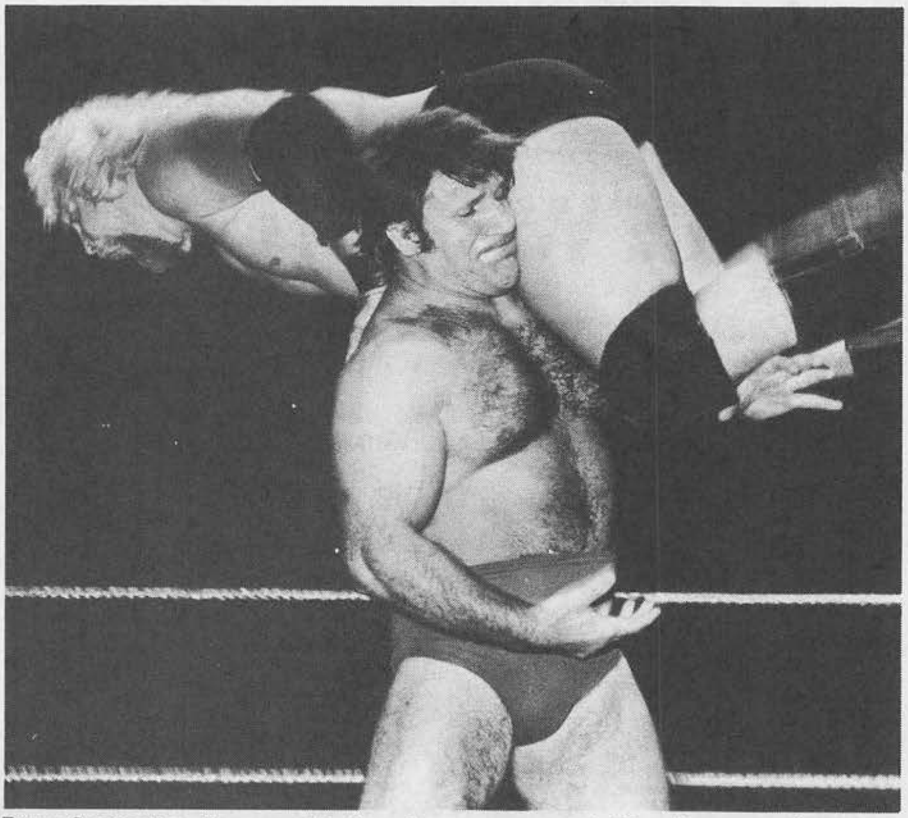
Q&A

Each month, *The Wrestler* will present a "Question and Answer" forum with an important figure in the wrestling world. It is your chance to meet wrestling's biggest stars as they answer the questions uppermost in the fans' minds

Q: Bruno, it's great to talk to you again. What's your reaction to being named the greatest wrestler of *The Wrestler* years?

A: I can't tell you how flattered I am, Bill. To be ranked with Dory Funk Jr., Verne Gagne, and all the others is really quite an honor.



Bruno Sammartino, the personification of raw power, sends Stan Hansen soaring across the Madison Square Garden ring during one of their classic 1976 bouts.

Q: 1963 was the year that turned your life around. You beat Buddy Rogers for the WWF title. Since our magazine began publishing in 1966, I'd like to ask you who your toughest opponents were during that time period.

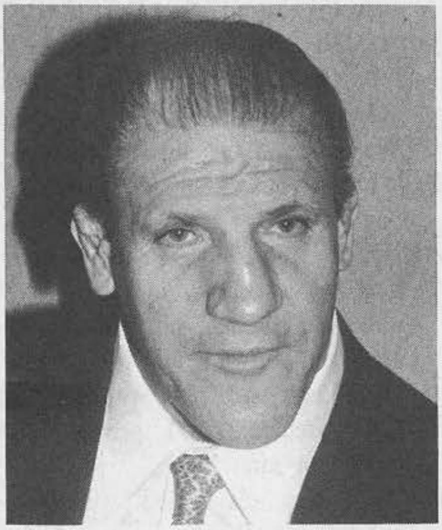
A: *(pauses)* There were so many. I had some classic battles against Gorilla Monsoon. I recall a grueling match I had against him that lasted an hour and 25 minutes in the old Madison Square Garden. He broke one of his ribs early on in that match, but, like a valiant warrior, he kept going on. Monsoon pushed me to the limits in that match. He was a big man—401 pounds, as I recall—and he wanted my title with a passion.

Q: Who else pushed you to the limit back then?

A: Well, to name a few, Killer Kowalski, Bulldog Brower, Bill Miller, and Cowboy Bill Watts. Great competitors, all of them.

Q: But none of them could take your title. It took Ivan Koloff—a man you had beaten in the past—to end your first title reign.

A: I'll never forget that night. When Koloff came off the ropes with that kneedrop and pinned me, he not only silenced me, but he silenced the 21,000 fans in Madison Square Garden as well. The arena was like a funeral parlor. Everyone just sat there and stared. I was no



BRUNO SAMMARTINO

THERE HAVE BEEN many wrestlers during the past 25 years that have made claims to being a legend. Deep down in the hearts—and in the hearts of most wrestling fans—they knew that there was only one true legend.

Immediately after Bruno Sammartino made his U.S. debut in 1959, the soft-spoken, humble man from Abruzzi, Italy, captured the hearts of the public with his rugged and exciting ring style.

After he defeated Buddy Rogers by submission in 48 seconds to capture the WWWF (now WWF) World title on May 17, 1963, Bruno went on to hold the belt for 7½ years. He defeated Stan Stasiak in 1973 to regain his title, and held it for another 3½ years.

Bruno's 11 years with the title is a record that will likely never be broken, as is his record of selling out arenas all over the country. It is for those reasons that editors have determined that Sammartino is the greatest wrestler in the history of ***The Wrestler****.*

Senior Editor Bill Apter, who has forged a close relationship with Sammartino over the years, spoke with the legend . . . the only legend . . . the "Living Legend" in New York.

longer champion.

Q: How did that feel?

A: Horrible. But I was never one for excuses. I felt that I had let all my fans down. All I can say is that on January 18, 1971, Ivan Koloff was the better man. Truthfully, I didn't realize until the next day that it was actually a relief to lose the belt.

Q: Why did you feel that way?

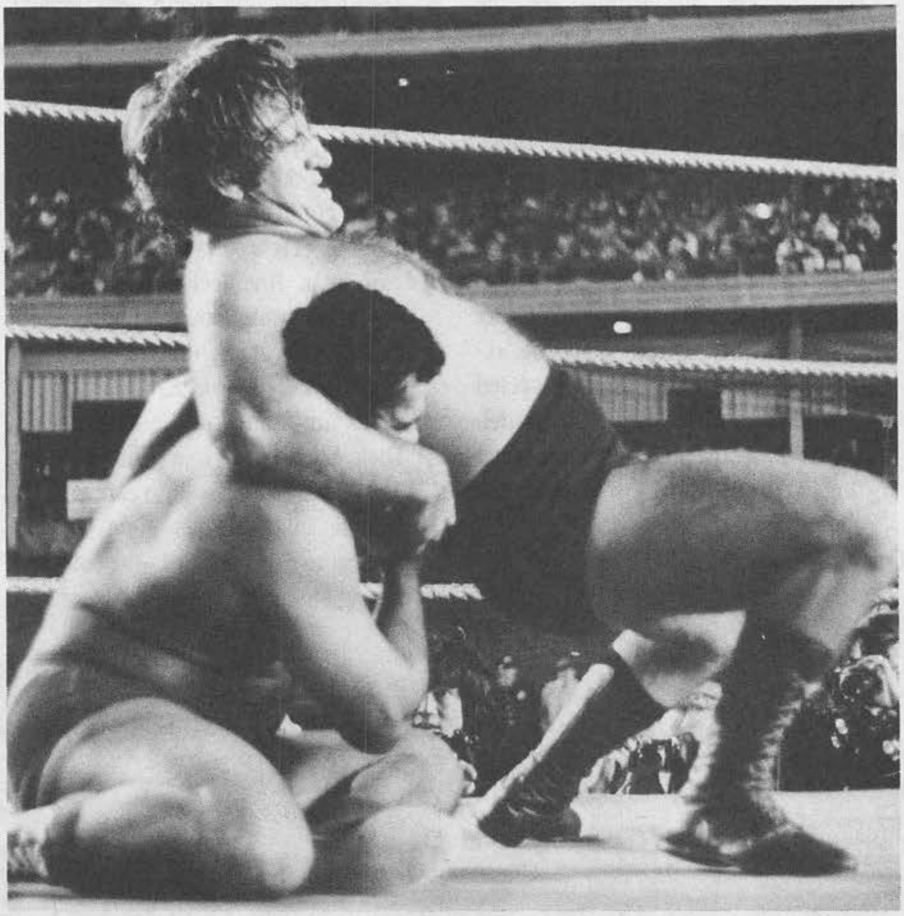
A: I had held that belt since May 17, 1963—almost eight years. My body was aching and needed time to heal. Also, my wife and my sons were not getting much attention from me. That was a situation I wanted to correct.

Q: You wrestled periodically after that, and at one point you publicly stated that you never wanted to be WWF champion again. However, you wrestled Pedro Morales for the belt in 1972 at Shea Stadium in New York.

A: That was a situation that came about after Pedro and I had gotten into an argument during a tag team match, and our friendship was in question. On top of that, the public was putting a lot of pressure on both of us.

Q: How so?

A: Folks were saying that Pedro could not beat me. So he made the challenge. At the same time, I heard some fans saying that Bruno didn't have what it takes anymore. So we wrestled for one hour and 16 minutes—until the 11 p.m. curfew. It was a classic scientific match, and we hugged afterward. We resolved our differences and became good friends again.



In 1972, Sammartino reluctantly wrestled an old friend, then-WWF champion Pedro Morales. After fighting to a draw, they quickly resolved their differences.

Q: But after that match, you said you *still* weren't interested in the title. So why did you accept a title match against Stan Stasiak in 1973?

A: Actually, I had gone to Japan, and I signed to wrestle Stasiak at the next card at Madison Square Garden before I left. While in Japan, Stasiak beat Pedro, so my match became a title match.

Q: Were you happy when you won the belt the second time?

A: Yes, but do you want to know a

secret? I wasn't nearly as elated as the first time. When I looked at that belt as the referee handed it to me, I saw the long road ahead. That was already taking the sheen off the belt for me.

Q: Did the second title reign prove as tough as the first?

A: *Tougher.* The men of the '70s seemed even more rugged. I faced Stan Hansen, Bruiser Brody, Don Leo Jonathan, Bobby Duncum, and Superstar Graham. They were incredible.

Q: Graham ended your second reign.

A: Yes, but he pinned me with his feet on the ropes, mind you. But that was the end for Bruno and the title. At that point, I tried to get my body and personal life back together again.

Q: Any regrets about the title years?

A: Really, there's only one. I always wanted to wrestle the NWA or AWA champions and unify the belts, so there would have been only *one* world champion. Other than than, how can there be regrets? I believe I was a respected champion and a good role model. I was part of an era in wrestling that I don't think we'll ever see again. That's very sad.

Q: What has changed?

A: Wrestlers of today are a different breed. They mostly rely on sheer power to compete. Most of the wrestlers of my era were much more versatile than today's wrestlers. I could adapt to any style my opponent brought to the ring. If he was an aerial grappler, I adapted to him. If he was a powerhouse, I could change my style. Most wrestlers today can't do that. They are not schooled the way my generation of wrestler was.

Q: How would Bruno Sammartino—in his prime—fare against current WWF World champion Hulk Hogan?

A: Don't make me laugh. My feeling is that Hogan is more show than he is a wrestler. I really don't think I would have much trouble beating Hogan. Let's just leave it at that.

Q: What about Ric Flair?

A: Flair could have given me some trouble. He's very smart, and he can be a fine technical wrestler—when he wants to be. Flair is one of the few stars today I can honestly call a *wrestler*.

Q: Who are some of the others?

A: Rick Steamboat is a fine wrestler. Larry Zbyszko, well, yeah, Larry, despite all that has gone on between us, is one of the all-time best. I'd also add Bret Hart to that list. His father, Stu Hart, truly brought the greatness out in that kid. I'm also impressed with Steve Williams and the Steiner brothers.

Q: What about your son, David Sammartino?

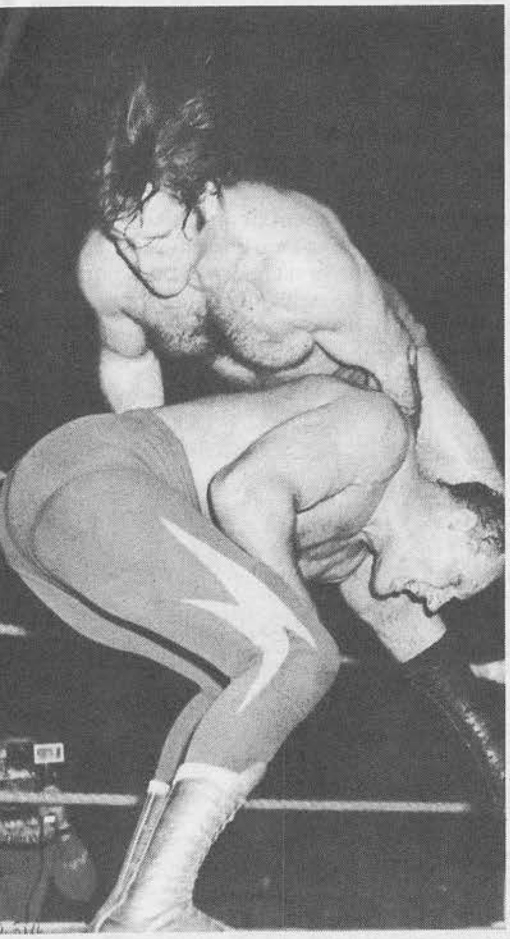
A: No, I won't forget about him *(laughs)*. David is in his prime now. He is sleek, his body looks great and performs well for him. If David can work his way into a major federation, I predict big things for him.

Q: You seem dissatisfied with the sport today. Where do you think wrestling is headed?

A: I wish it were headed backward. I really don't like the way wrestling is today. There's too much show today. Every wrestler has a gimmick, you know what I mean? In my day, you didn't come to the ring with a snake or a bird or have to be surrounded by celebrities. Sure, some guys wore masks, and we had cage matches. But in my day, wrestling was more pure. People came to see what the marquee advertised: *wrestling*. I am actually embarrassed by some of the ridiculous things I see today.

Q: You've been quite vocal in airing your gripes in recent years.

Sammartino's living room is like his own personal hall of fame. Above all, however, Bruno cherishes the personal relationships he's established with the fans over the last 32 years.



Bruno says that when he squared off against men like Killer Kowalski, their matches were good old-fashioned wrestling, without the showmanship that permeates the sport today.

A: **Well, why not? People come up to me and ask me about some of this garbage today, and I don't know what to say to them. I worked very hard in my years to put some respectability in wrestling. Many of the promoters today have gone out of their way to erase any trace of that. I can just hope and pray that someday the public will tire of all this glitz and demand that the promoters bring back good wrestling. Get rid of all the showmanship that some people think is necessary to draw crowds.**

Q: In your estimation, what *does* draw crowds?

A: **Wrestling. *Quality* wrestling. I had 211 main events at MSG—the two Gardens—and I had 187 sellouts in all. Nobody has done that since. Wrestling just isn't the same anymore.**

Q: Amen. □

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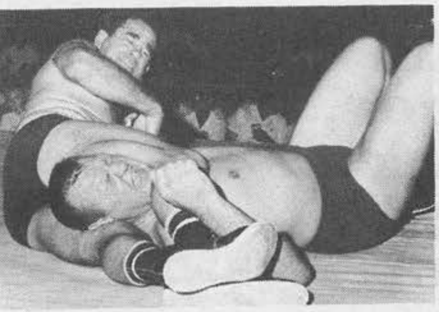
Gene Kiniski

Match of the Year
Gene Kiniski vs. Lou Thesz



Tag Team of the Year
Crusher & Bruiser

1966

[There was only one issue of *The Wrestler* in our inaugural year. It was dated October 1966.]

Five Seconds Flat! The first story in the history of *The Wrestler* focused on Sonny Thomas' lightning-fast victory over Chico Santana in a battle of midget wrestlers.

"Who Can Take My Belt Away?" NWA champion Gene Kiniski listed, in no particular order, Bruiser, Eddie Graham, Bob Ellis, and Bruno Sammartino as the four men with the best chance to beat him in a title bout. At first Kiniski was reluctant to answer the question, but he relented when he considered that his response could help attendance at his matches against any of the four men.

The Feud Behind The Fury Toni Rose went on a date with Linda Carroll's boyfriend and stayed with him until the wee hours of the morning. When Linda found out, it led to a brutal match that left both women's pretty faces black and blue. Carroll got her revenge by pinning Rose before a supportive crowd.

Blassie Raises Hell (Again) After a remarkably quick recovery from hepatitis and a kidney operation, the much-loathed Fred Blassie re-emerged onto the wrestling scene as a manager. In a match pitting his wrestlers, Chief Little Eagle and Mario Galento, against the Von Brauners, Blassie scuffled with opposing manager Saul Weingeroff.

Queen Of The Mat. This retrospective honored the legendary Mildred Burke, who made her professional debut on September 17, 1934, and reportedly lost just one match during her 18-year career. In that time, Burke wrestled 3,500 bouts and beat anyone who came her way. Included among her victories were 250 wins over male wrestlers in her weight class.

"I'm Glad Lou Thesz Lost His Title!" Bruno Sammartino made this statement out of resentment for Thesz' refusal to meet him in the ring. Nonetheless, in an exclusive interview conducted by *The Wrestler*, Sammartino maintained great respect for Thesz' skills and accomplishments.

Master Of The Bow And Arrow "Cowboy" Jack Lanza—a genuine cowboy, by the way—epitomized the new breed of clean-cut, college-educated wrestlers. The 26-year-old Lanza supported his wife and young daughter with a mixture of wrestling speed and knowhow. Lanza's finisher was the tortuous "bow and arrow," in which he grabbed one arm and one leg of his helpless opponent, then plunged his foot into the victim's back.

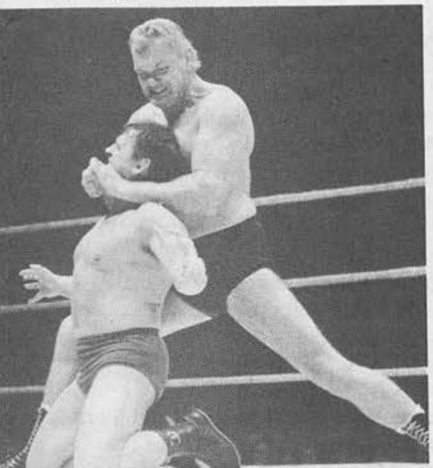
Put On The Gloves? What For? To prevent the sneaky Medics from making illegal switches in their match against Billy Hines and Gregg Petterson, promoter Fred Ward ordered Medic No. 2 to wear black gloves. Ward couldn't stop The Medics from cheating, however, and they were disqualified when Medic No. 1 hurled Hines out of the ring and onto the press table.

"I Wuz Robbed" Ex-Sumo wrestling star Taro Myaki was forging a successful path through the ranks of American competition. Combining his formidable weight with his martial arts training, Myaki won the majority of his bouts. The only times he lost were, in his words, "because of those ignorant referees who disqualify me and rob me of victory."

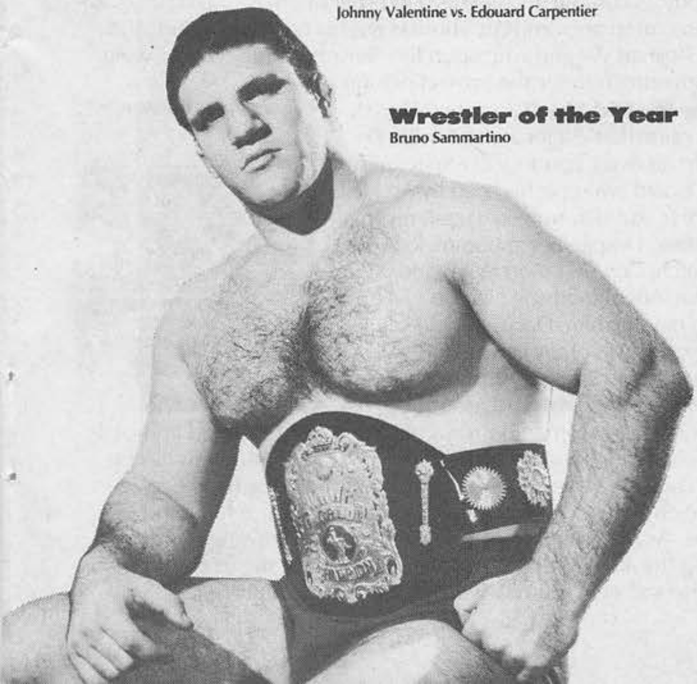
Don Eagle's Last Phone Call One day before the famous Indian wrestler shot himself, he called longtime friend Tony Lanza, who doubled as a wrestler and photographer for *The Wrestler*. In the first conversation the pair had had in many months, Eagle spoke of the family and financial problems that were dragging him down. Lanza didn't decipher the hidden message in Eagle's words until it was too late.

1967

Tag Team of the Year
Larry Hennig & Harley Race



Match of the Year
Johnny Valentine vs. Edouard Carpentier



Wrestler of the Year
Bruno Sammartino

Stories of the year

The Story They Couldn't Tell About Ed "Strangler" Lewis (February) Lewis died at age 76 in August 1966, and this story provided a revealing look at the "Strangler's" life. From the time he first became interested in wrestling at age seven to his legendery carousing and womanizing to the time he knocked off seven wrestlers in a row in a total time of 22 minutes, Lewis was a legend. Old-timers still count Ed's lethal headlock as one of the most effective holds in wrestling history.

Mario Galento's Secret Weapon (February) Whether it was a razor, a switchblade, or some other sharp object, one will never know because Galento was a master at concealing his weapon. In a match against Billy Boy Hines, Galento opened a huge gash over Hines' right eye that resulted in Galento's disqualification.

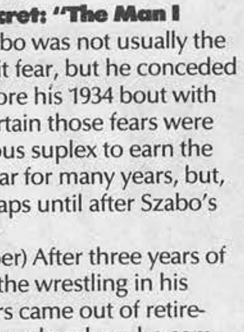
Singh-Watson—Revival Of A Bloodbath (April) In 1947, Nanjo Singh and Whipper Watson engaged in one of the most horrible bouts of all-time. When it was over, Singh needed a three-hour operation to remove a piece of wood from his spine and Watson required 250 stitches. Nearly 20 years later, the pair hooked up in another bloody battle that ended when frenzied fans stormed the ring.

Sandy Barr: "They Threw Me To The Wolves!" (April) At 19, the good-looking, broad-shouldered Barr was an up-and-coming talent who had yet to gain widespread popularity. In an effort to publicize Sandy, matchmakers pitted the 200-pounder against Jerry Graham (340 pounds), Mighty Ursus (310), and Ox Anderson (320) all within a three-month time period. Though he was hopelessly outweighed and might have been badly injured, Barr whipped through the bouts in fine fashion, pinning Graham and Anderson and hurling Ursus out of the ring and toward a hospital bed.

Sandor Szabo's Secret: "The Man I Feared" (April) Szabo was not usually the type of man to admit fear, but he conceded he was nervous before his 1934 bout with then-champion Jim Londos. Londos made certain those fears were well-founded as he reversed Szabo's dangerous suplex to earn the pin. *The Wrestler* knew of Szabo's night of fear for many years, but, true to our word, we kept the story under wraps until after Szabo's death, in October 1966.

Buddy Rogers' Secret Comeback (September) After three years of retirement, Rogers couldn't take it anymore; the wrestling in his blood forced Buddy back into the ring. Rogers came out of retirement quietly, wrestling his first 20 bouts in Canada, where he compiled a 20-0 record. Despite his hunger for the belt, the ex-champion was never able to regain the NWA title.

The Wrestler With A Flame-Thrower In His Fingertips (September) The Sheik was already the maddest, baddest figure in all of wrestling. Then he added flame-throwing to his repertoire of underhanded tactics. No one could explain how The Sheik caused darts of flame to fly from his fingertips. He nearly blinded Dory Funk Jr. and he was arrested in Houston after he blasted opponent Don Curtis with a dangerous dosage of fire.



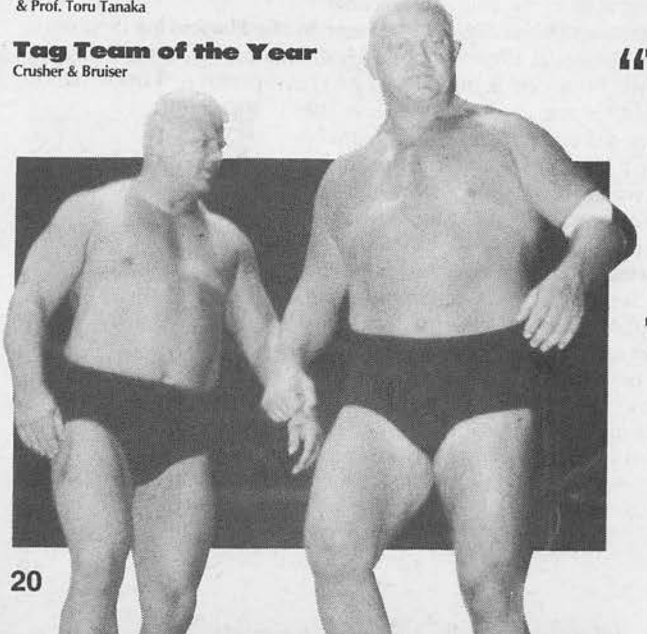
Sammartino-Kiniski: Tag Team Partners? (September) WWF champion Bruno Sammartino and NWA titleholder Gene Kiniski were considered bitter rivals. The true rivalry, however, may have been among the fans across land who argued about who the real champion of wrestling was. The champs shocked fans and fellow wrestlers by teaming together in Toronto. Not surprisingly, these great competitors won easily, squashing Bulldog Brower and Johnny Valentine in only 2:36.

1968

Wrestler of the Year
Verne Gagne

Match of the Year
Bruno Sammartino, Edouard Carpentier, & Victor Rivera vs. Gorilla Monsoon, The Kentucky Butcher, & Prof. Toru Tanaka

Tag Team of the Year
Crusher & Bruiser



Stories of the year

Bruiser Calling: "Get Me The Lousiest Wrestler You Can Find. I Want Him For My Partner!" (February) Bruiser was out to settle a vicious feud with the tag team of Angelo Poffo and Chris Markoff, and especially their interfering manager, Bobby Heenan. Bruiser, anxious to prove his superiority, wanted to take them all on by himself, but the athletic commission wouldn't sanction a match unless Bruiser had a partner. So Bruiser recruited George Ringo—the worst pro wrestler he could find. The bout unfolded at a hectic pace, and was eventually ruled a double-countout.

"I'm Glad I Lost My Title," Says Lou Thesz (February) Thesz was going after his fifth NWA World title when he admitted that he was probably happier without the belt. The 48-year-old Thesz said he didn't like the pressure of being champ and he preferred being embraced as an underdog by the fans. Thesz would win a fifth title—then go on to win a sixth!

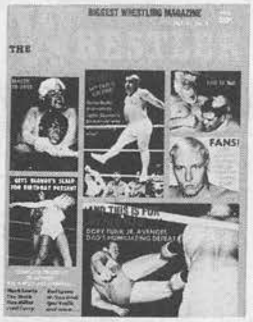
Amazing Comeback By The Famous Wrestler Who Lost His Guts (May) Fred Blassie's career appeared to be over when he contracted hepatitis and underwent a major operation. But Blassie dedicated himself to wrestling as never before—he even gave up the late-night carousing and womanizing that was his trademark!—and within a year of the operation, "The Gutless Wonder" was mowing down one opponent after another.

The Night Terry Funk Busted Loose (May) Terry, the youngest of the Funk clan and, like his brother Dory, a future NWA World champion, made his first major breakthrough by defeating the powerful Hiro Matsuda after Matsuda had already disposed of Terry's father and brother. Terry got the victory when he avoided Matsuda's flying tackle and Matsuda flew out of the ring. Some say that Matsuda was unable to return before the referee's 20-count because he was dealt a hard punch by Dory Sr. in the front row.

Rocca's Spectacular Comeback (August) After being out of action for nearly two years with an injured knee, the illustrious Antonino Rocca burst back onto the scene to beat The Masked Marvel. Saying he felt "like a young tiger," Rocca vowed to wrestle until he was 75 and live to be 150.

18-Man Battle Royal: Can You Guess Who Won? (August) Eighteen of the fiercest figures in wrestling rumbled in San Francisco for the then-lofty, winner-take-all prize of $7,000. The match proved rough and bloody as Lord Blears had his head split open, Paul Diamond suffered a fractured arm, and Art Thomas got his nose bashed in. The winner? Bearcat Wright, who spun Ray Stevens in his "Giant Swing" before covering him for the prize-clinching pin.

"This Is For My Old Man" (October) Dory Funk Sr. came home after a match with 40 stitches in his head, courtesy of a splintered wooden board swung at his head by Art Neilson. Dory Jr. was determined to gain revenge for his father. Despite being pummeled early in the match, Dory Jr. rallied to win the vicious bout. After bloodying Neilson's face and then pinning him, Dory Jr. called it "the most delicious win of my career."



The Night Bruno Sammartino Was Carried Out On A Stretcher (December) In a highly publicized six-man bout, Sammartino was rendered immobile when Gorilla Monsoon beat him with a chair. But minutes after being carted off on a stretcher, Sammartino, his bloody head bandaged, re-emerged to join his partners Edouard Carpentier and Victor Rivera. As the crowd went wild, Bruno got his revenge by slamming the 400-pound Monsoon to the mat for the decisive pin just moments before curfew would have ended the brawl.

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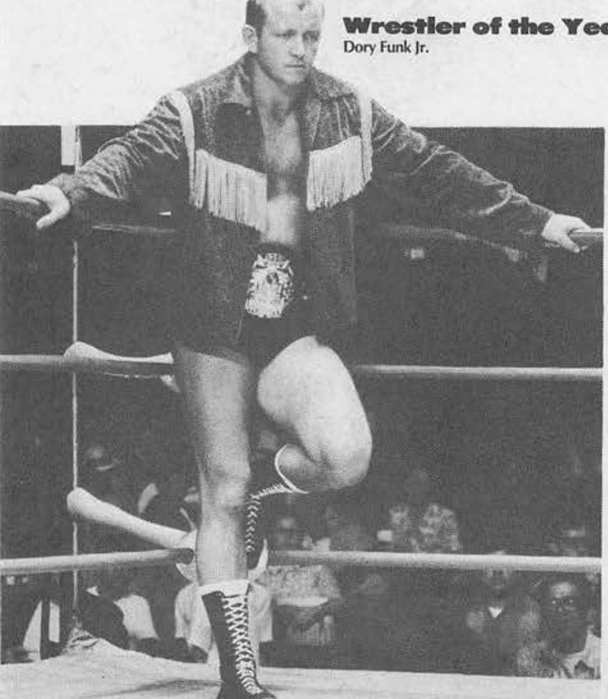
1969

Tag Team of the Year
Butcher & Mad Dog Vachon

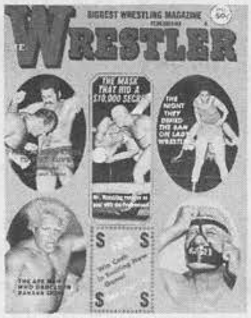
Match of the Year
Dory Funk Jr. vs. Gene Kiniski

Wrestler of the Year
Dory Funk Jr.



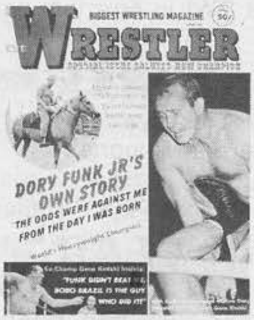
Stories of the year

Why Blassie Went To The Dogs (February) In matches against Bobo Brazil and Mil Mascaras, Fred Blassie reaffirmed his reputation as having the sharpest teeth in wrestling. Though he left dental imprints all over Mascaras, he was not awarded Mil's Americas championship because the bout was stopped by a doctor. Mascaras agreed to a rematch, but only if Blassie would wear a dog muzzle to keep him from biting. Blassie consented to the muzzle, then went out and lost the rematch.



"I Had To Turn Killer To Stay Alive" (February) For years "Cowboy" Jack Lanza wrestled strictly by the rules, even if it meant taking a beating in the process. Then one night his beloved wife, Barbara, came to a match and saw her husband get knocked about by Fred Blassie, who was doing whatever it took to win. At Barbara's urging, Lanza relocated from California to Chicago and changed his name to "Blackjack." It wasn't long before the new, devious Lanza was one of the top tough guys in the Midwest.

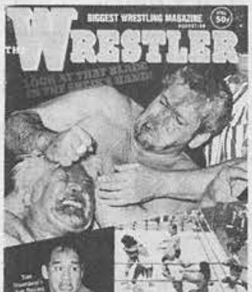
The Match Of The Century (April) Fans were clamoring for the dream matchup of NWA World champion Gene Kiniski and WWF World champion Bruno Sammartino. The pair had last wrestled on November 16, 1964, and Kiniski had literally stolen Sammartino's belt after a controversial bout. Alas, the rematch never came off as both wrestlers were bogged down for months with prior commitments.



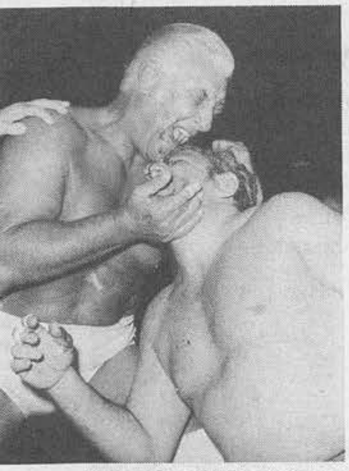
"How I Became Champion": The New Champion Tells How He Did It (June) Dory Funk Jr. prepared for his title match against Gene Kiniski with his father's help. Dory Sr. taught his son how to go for Kiniski's legs, and when the opportune moment arose in the ring, that's exactly what Dory Jr. did. He yanked Gene to the floor, then applied the Funks' famous spinning toe-hold. With both of his legs caught in Dory's potentially bone-breaking hold, Kiniski surrendered and a new champion was crowned.

Karl Gotch: "The Snakepit Taught Me How To Kill" (June). The amateur champion of Germany at age 16 and a member of Belgium's Olympic squad in 1948, Gotch thought he had the basics of the sport mastered. But while touring England, he was urged to visit the "Snakepit School" in Wigan. There, headmasters Billy Riley and Joe Robinson taught Gotch the rugged catch-as-catch-can style and dozens of submission holds that would make him one of the all-time greats.

Bloodbath Of The Century! The Sheik And Fred Blassie Trigger A Riot (August) Blassie overpowered Americas champ The Sheik in the early going, recording the first pin and delivering 24 consecutive kneedrops. Sheik's answer was to repeatedly stab Freddie in the face with a sharp object. With Blassie's face spouting blood, Sheik was awarded the second fall. Once Blassie recovered, he began biting chunks of flesh out of The Sheik, including one large piece of forearm that Blassie spat into the crowd. Freddie was on the verge of getting the final pin when Sheik's manager, "Weasel" Farouk, interfered and helped Sheik get an apparent victory. At this point the crowd in Los Angeles began rioting. They pulled down billboards and threw things around the arena until the decision was reversed and Blassie's arm was raised.



What A Pleasure This Match Was To See (August) Two well-conditioned wrestlers, Reg Parks and Doug Gilbert, hooked up in a match that was marked by sportsmanship and fair play. Both men displayed remarkable moves, and the match ended in a draw after 30 minutes. The crowd wasn't disappointed at all, as the wrestlers shook hands and left the ring with a lifelong memory.



Match of the Year
Fred Blassie vs. The Sheik

1970

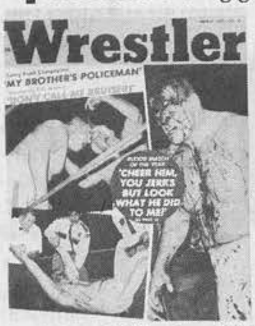
Wrestler of the Year
Bruno Sammartino

Tag Team of the Year
Bepo & Gito Mongol

Stories of the year

Hey, Look! There's Farouk! But Where's The Sheik? (March) "The Weasel"—Abdullah Farouk, a rulebreaking manager who later became known as The Grand Wizard—would ordinarily rely on The Sheik to take care of the wrestling end of the game. But after Farouk nearly blinded Mr. Moto with a ball of flame during a title match between The Sheik and Moto's charge, Bobo Brazil, Moto challenged Farouk to fight. Abdullah reluctantly accepted and, despite toting sharp tools into the ring, was beaten into unconsciousness.

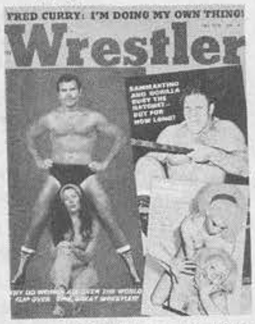
"I'm My Brother's Policeman," Says Terry Funk. (March) In his latest act of sibling guardianship, Terry Funk agreed to wrestle The Destroyer, who coveted Dory Funk Jr.'s title. The deal was that if Destroyer could beat Terry, he'd get a shot at Dory Jr. Despite Destroyer's strength advantage, Terry controlled the first 27 minutes of the match before Destroyer connected with a hard smash to the back of Terry's head and moved in for the pin. Terry would go on trying to protect his brother while Destroyer never garnered the championship he craved.



Dr. Sam Sheppard—The Ex-Convict Who Revolutionized Wrestling. (May) After spending 10 years in prison on a murder conviction that the courts later rescinded, Sam Sheppard came back into society and began wrestling for charity and serving as a guinea pig for cancer research. Sheppard teamed with George Strickland, and the pair ran off a 20-match unbeaten streak with the help of Sheppard's invention: the "mandibular nerve press."

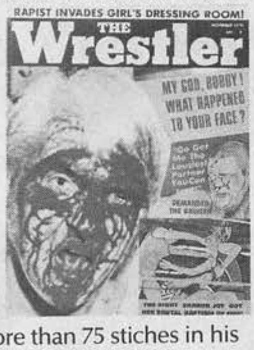
"This Was My Toughest Title Defense" By Dory Funk Jr. (May) All along, Dory knew he was in for a tough bout against high-flying Mexican Mil Mascaras. Dory wasn't comfortable wrestling a masked man, and he knew the Los Angeles crowd would be pulling for Mascaras. Though Mascaras was able to heave Dory out of the ring, the champ recovered and held on to his belt when the match ended in a draw at curfew.

Bruno And The Gorilla Are Pals—But How Long Will It Last? (July) Bruno Sammartino and Gorilla Monsoon were fierce rivals until the night Bruno saved Gorilla after he was bitten in the neck by The Sheik. Fans and the press doubted if these former enemies could remain friends, but time proved these disbelievers wrong.



Skull Murphy Is Dead. (July) At 38, 20 years into a successful career as an intimidating wrestling force, John Joseph Murphy died of a heart attack. Though Murphy was widely disliked for his nastiness in the ring, mourners dwelled on his personal merits in remembering one of the most exciting competitors wrestling had ever seen.

Bruno Loses—But Keeps His Title. (September) The largest crowd in New York history (20,819) filed into Madison Square Garden and were shocked to see Bruno Sammartino lose to Crusher Verdu, the Spaniard with a 68-inch chest, because of a badly cut eye. Since the win was not by pin or submission, Sammartino retained his WWF title.



My God Bobby! What Happened To Your Face? (November) Bobby Heenan, manager of Baron Von Raschke, was attacked during a match against the Bruiser. The Bruiser was out to avenge Heenan's interference in a match between Bruiser and Heenan's prize client, Blackjack Lanza. Bruiser got his satisfaction, delivering repeated punches to Heenan's face and forcing Bobby to take more than 75 stiches in his head.

1971

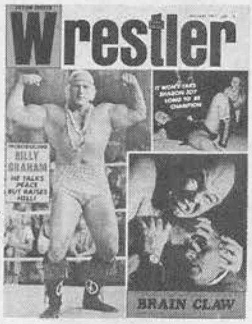
Match of the Year
Ivan Koloff vs. Bruno Sammartino

Wrestler of the Year
Pedro Morales

Tag Team of the Year
Luke Graham & Tarzan Tyler

Stories of the year

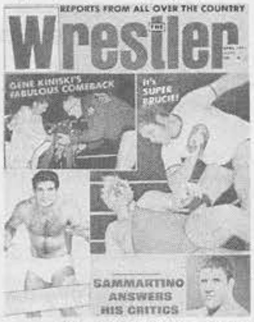
Baron Von Raschke's Brain Claw—It Must Be Banned! (January) Inspired by Fritz Von Erich's iron claw, Von Raschke's brain claw, in which he gripped his opponent's head with his huge hands and powerful fingers and put tremendous pressure on the brain, was even more deadly. "I get the feeling that my fingers are digging right through the guy's skull and into his brain," said Von Raschke . . . thus, our recommendation.



This Billy Graham Preaches Only Violence! (January) It was only ugly irony that this brutal wrestler shared the same name with the famous evangelist. This former Junior Mr. America and Mr. Arizona, who possessed 24-inch arms and a—*ahem*—godlike physique, would go on to defeat Bruno Sammartino for the WWF World title on April 30, 1977. By then he was known as "Superstar," and that he was.

Bob Windham: "Football Is For Sissies, Wrestling Is For Men!" (March) The former Dallas Cowboy and New York Jet said he "gave up football because it wasn't tough enough for me. I wanted something with real body contact." Windham especially didn't like the padding he wore in football, preferring to crash his 6'7", 280-pound frame directly into his opponents. Windham would gain his fame under the name Blackjack Mulligan. His sons, Barry and Kendall, would make sure the Windham name was not forgotten.

Paul Jones Says: "Let's Run Out The Dirty Wrestlers!" (April) A popular, highly scientific wrestler in his seventh year as a pro, Paul Jones was determined to rid wrestling of cheating. Jones said he learned to hate foul play in his years as a TV cameraman, where he picked up things the referee never saw. Unable to succeed in his crusade, Jones eventually became a rulebreaking manager.



Why The Brisco Brothers Won't Team Up (April) Jack Brisco was determined to parlay his NCAA collegiate championship into a world professional championship. Jerry had singles plans of his own. But can anyone name two brothers in this sport who didn't eventually team? The Briscos would eventually win three NWA World tag team titles.

And Now, Florida Falls To The Outlaws (May) In the early days of two legendary careers, Dick Murdoch and Dusty Rhodes were raking in the money and romping over every challenger who came their way. Desite their violent ways, The Outlaws didn't consider themselves rulebreakers. "There's only winners and losers," they roared, "and we're winners!" Rhodes, at least, learned that a true winner has to be true to himself and the fans.

Fred Blassie Tells: "Why Tolos Blinded Me" (November) As Fred Blassie received the award as California's "Wrestler of the Year," his ex-tag team partner, John Tolos, threw toxic Monsel's powder into his face and eyes. After beating Blassie for the Americas championship, Tolos—today a WWF manager—felt *he* deserved to be "Wrestler of the Year." Blassie, who suffered severe corneal damage to his left eye, said he felt that Tolos was angry that he had abandoned the rulebreaking tag team to wrestle cleanly on his own. Their ensuing feud was legendary.

The Grand Wizard's Double Trouble (November) Never have there been two less compatible wrestlers in one stable than the rugged Blackjack Mulligan and the effeminate Beautiful Bobby. They didn't like each other at all. In fact, their manager, The Grand Wizard, needed all his wizardry to keep them from tearing each other apart. Unfortunately, he succeeded.

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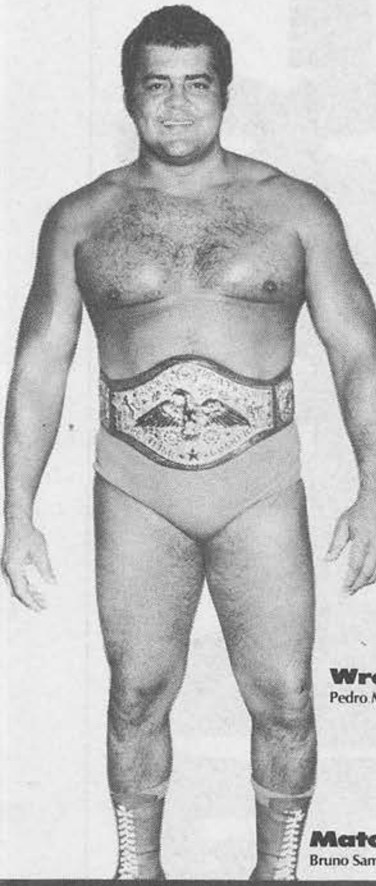
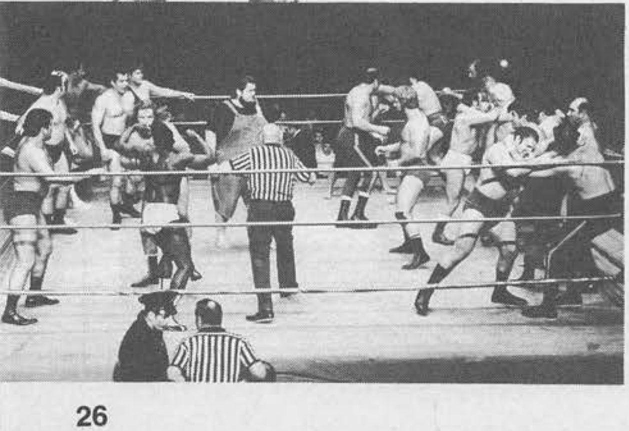
1972

Tag Team of the Year
Crusher & Bruiser



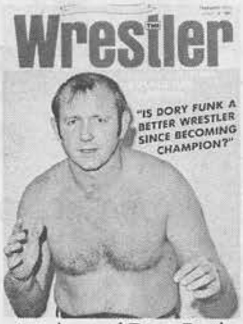
Wrestler of the Year
Pedro Morales

Match of the Year
Bruno Sammartino wins Los Angeles battle royal



Stories of the year

Ten Famous Stars Answer This Question: Has Dory Funk Jr. Become A Better Wrestler Since He Became Champion? (February) As could be expected, the responses to this question varied greatly. Dory Jr. received high praise from men like Mil Mascaras ("Funk is better now than he was at any other stage of his career"), but other wrestlers disagreed. Said Nick Bockwinkel: "[Funk] is nowhere near as good as he was two years ago." Dory Jr. held the NWA belt until he lost to Harley Race on May 24, 1973.



When Pedro Morales Wrestled Dory Funk Jr. (March) While the world cried for the unification match between WWF champ Morales and NWA champ Funk that would never take place, *The Wrestler* learned that the two men used to wrestle each other quite often while they were honing their skills under the tutelage of Dory Funk Sr. "We each pinned each other quite often," Morales recalled. "I can't remember one or the other of us having an edge."

Bruno Sammartino Beats 21 Opponents—All In One Night (May) Sammartino emerged from semiretirement to eliminate Ripper Collins and win the $11,000 22-man Los Angeles battle royal. More than 25,000 fans were turned away at the door of the sold-out Olympic Auditorium.

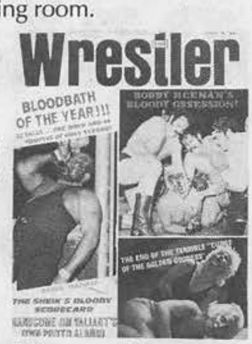
Should The Piledriver Be Banned? (June) An NWA study revealed that victims of the piledriver had a 30 percent chance of a skull fracture and a 75 percent chance of a concussion, thus rekindling the movement to ban the dangerous move. Despite several severe casualites—South American Ricardo Montanez was completely paralyzed and suffered brain damage from a piledriver—veteran wrestlers such as Nick Bockwinkel, a practitioner of the move, supported its legality.

It Started As A Title Match And Ended In A Battle Royal (August) Number-one contender Jack Brisco controlled most of the bout against NWA champion Dory Funk Jr., but wasn't able to register a pin. Late in the match, referee Stu Schwartz was knocked out, prompting six wrestlers to join in the action. Funk and Brisco were both disqualified.

New York Gives Up—But The Girls Aren't Through Yet! (September) The sex barrier was broken when the New York State Athletic Commission dropped its ban on women wrestlers. Female activists vowed to fight for their right to fight in Tokyo and to get New York to drop its ban on masked wrestlers of either sex.

Bloodbath Of The Year! 27 Falls . . . One Hour and 44 Minutes Of Gory Terror! (September) Fierce enemies Cyclone Negro and Dory Funk Sr. hooked up in one of the most brutal and bloody Texas death matches ever. Funk Sr. claimed the victory when, leading 14 pins to 12, he knocked Negro out for over one minute with a hard right hand. Funk later collapsed in his dressing room.

The Sheik's Bloody Scorecard! (September) The following occurred during The Sheik's match against John Tolos: Two referees were hospitalized and X-rayed; promoter Mike LeBell was carved into a bloody mess by The Sheik's pencil; policeman Tom Cornwell was stabbed; Tolos received 18 stiches; The Sheik received eight stiches; and 19 innocent fans were treated for injuries.



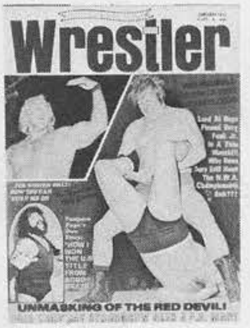
Should Larry Hennig And Dusty Rhodes Be Barred From TV? (October) This rule-breaking tag team was so unnecessarily brutal that many fans couldn't bear to watch them.

After Moolah—Who? (December) Speculation was rampant that Fabulous Moolah—women's champion since 1956—was losing her grip on the title. It turned out to be a false alarm as Moolah retained her belt for another *12 years* before losing to Wendi Richter in 1984.

1973

Stories of the year

The "Super Bowl" Of Wrestling (January) In an event that foreshadowed the supercards of the mid-1980s and beyond, this card, held at Cleveland's Municipal Stadium and sanctioned by the National Wrestling Federation, featured 50 wrestlers. Ten countries were represented in the five-hour event that included six championship matches, three tournaments, and midget and female competiton. Johnny Powers beat Johnny Valentine in the main event.



The Scandal That Could Ruin Wrestling! (February) Lord Al Hays deserved the NWA belt after he beat champion Dory Funk Jr. in a best-of-three-falls bout. But due to Dory Funk Sr.'s contrived interference *after* the final pin, Dory Jr. retained his title via the DQ rule. Inexplicably, Hays' protest was denied.

Well . . . Killer . . . Did You Learn A Lesson? (March) Jean Ferre—later to be known as Andre the Giant—gave Killer Kowalski the worst beating of his career. Ferre might have won Kowalski's Grand Prix belt had he not smashed Killer so relentlessly that he was disqualified.

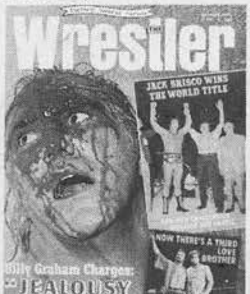
Have Bruno's Fans Stabbed Him In The Back? (March) It was a shock to everyone when Bruno Sammartino was booed before a Shea Stadium match against Pedro Morales. New York fans were disappointed that Sammartino had lost his belt and were angry that Bruno had stopped wrestling in New York as often as he used to. After wrestling to a thrilling curfew draw that lasted one hour and 16 minutes, Morales and Sammartino hugged and were both warmly applauded.

Should Bockwinkel And Stevens Be Stripped Of Their AWA Tag Team Championship? (June) Several wrestlers started a campaign to strip Ray Stevens and Nick Bockwinkel of their belts because they weren't making enough defenses. Though the pair made its mandatory once-a-month title defense, most of their other matches were non-title affairs.

Look What Happened To Dory Jr.! Will He Wrestle Again? (July) None of the punishment Dory Funk Jr. withstood in the ring disabled him as badly as when he drove his pickup truck off a six-foot creek bank. Dory Jr. suffered injuries to his shoulder and side as well as lacerations on his face and scalp. Because he was wearing his seat belt, and thanks to his remarkable recuperative powers, Funk was back in the ring within three months.

"How I Won The Title From Dory Funk Jr." (September) Harley Race explained how he beat the man no one else could stop in this *Wrestler* exclusive. Race was impressed by the toughness Funk showed after his truck accident, but was well-prepared and he refused to buckle under Funk's pressure in the decisive third fall. Race used a powerful suplex to set up the title-winning pin.

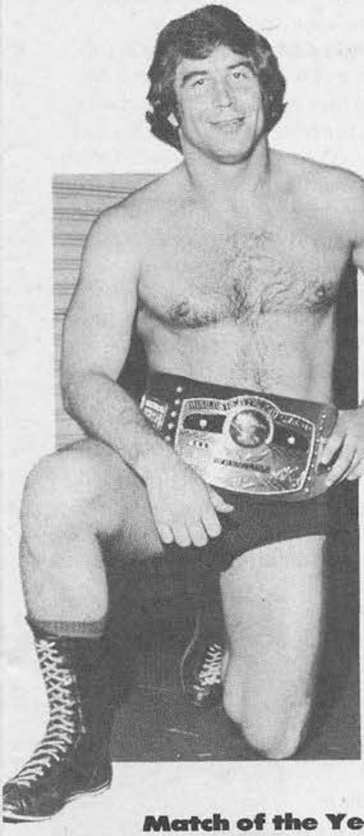
The Night Abdullah The Butcher Got Butchered! (October) The friendship between two of the most vicious grapplers around, Tor Kamata and Abdullah the Butcher, fell apart because Abdullah had something Kamata wanted: the North American championship. Despite absorbing a pencil attack at the outset of their title match, Kamata beat Abdullah's face into a bloody mess. Since the match was halted before two pins were made, the Butcher held on to his title.



Jack Brisco Wins The NWA Title From Harley Race! (October) After just eight weeks as champion, Race relinquished the belt to Brisco on a hot night in Houston. Brisco bounced off the ropes and knocked Race to the floor for the pin that began the first of his two title reigns.

Wrestling's Most Devastating Tag Team (December) The rulebreaking Bruiser and the law-abiding Bruno Sammartino joined forces to capture the WWA tag team belts with a convincing win over champs Ernie Ladd and Baron Von Raschke.

Tag Team of the Year
Nick Bockwinkel & Ray Stevens

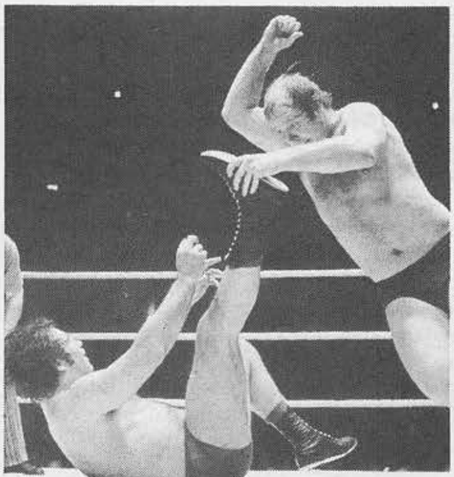


Wrestler of the Year
Jack Brisco

Match of the Year
Harley Race vs. Dory Funk Jr.

1974

Wrestler of the Year
Bruno Sammartino

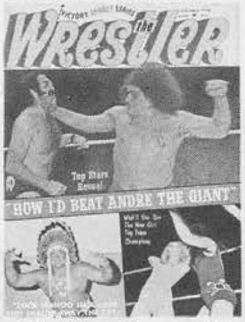


Match of the Year
Dory Funk Jr. vs. Jack Brisco

Tag Team of the Year
Johnny & Jimmy Valiant

Stories of the year

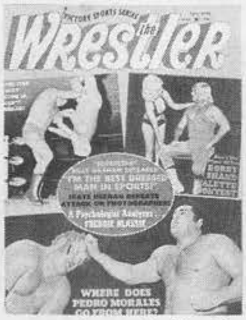
Why Can't American Wrestlers Defeat Inoki And Sakaguchi? (February) Many Americans traveled to Japan to face one or both members of this championship tag team, and each U.S. delegation came home on the losing end. Weakened by Antonio Inoki and Seiji Sagaguchi's painful holds and frustrated by the noisy Japanese crowds, several U.S. teams resorted to rulebreaking, but even that didn't help.



"How I'd Beat Andre The Giant" (February) The top stars of wrestling revealed their plans for beating the Giant. They spoke of out-thinking and out-running Andre, but those well-laid plans remained useless: Andre didn't lose until he bowed to Hulk Hogan in 1987.

Is There Anyone Stronger Than Ken Patera? (March) Patera, a former Olympic weightlifter, flaunted his tremendous strength by beating tag teams singlehandedly!

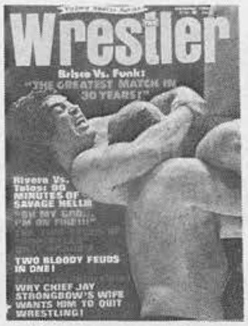
Where Does Pedro Go From Here? (April) His 34-month reign as WWF champion ended by Stan Stasiak, Pedro Morales pondered his future. After three years of wrestling five nights per week, Morales decided to take a vaction, saying, "I don't know if I want the title again." Whether he wanted it or not, Morales would never again wear the cherished WWF belt.



Why Fans Forgive Mr. Wrestling II (August) His supporters understood that Mr. Wrestling II's turn from good to bad was done for the purpose of landing a shot at Jack Brisco's NWA belt. II's devoted fans remained loyal even as he was unable to capture the title. Appreciative of their undying support, II changed his ways once again and reverted to his previous stance as a paragon of probity.

Why The Fargos Split Up (August) This vicious tag team fell apart when John Fargo decided to pursue personal goals. John met success on his own, but Don Fargo experienced a string of losses—and suffered a broken leg—as he fought on with various partners of lesser caliber.

Brisco vs. Funk: "The Greatest Match In 30 Years!" (September) This title match featured fine scientific wrestling by two of the best-conditioned grapplers in the NWA. It took 47 minutes for champion Jack Brisco to pin ex-champ Dory Funk Jr. in the bout's first and only fall. When the match ended at the one-hour time limit, Brisco was awarded the decision, retaining his title in what many referred to as "the greatest match in 30 years."

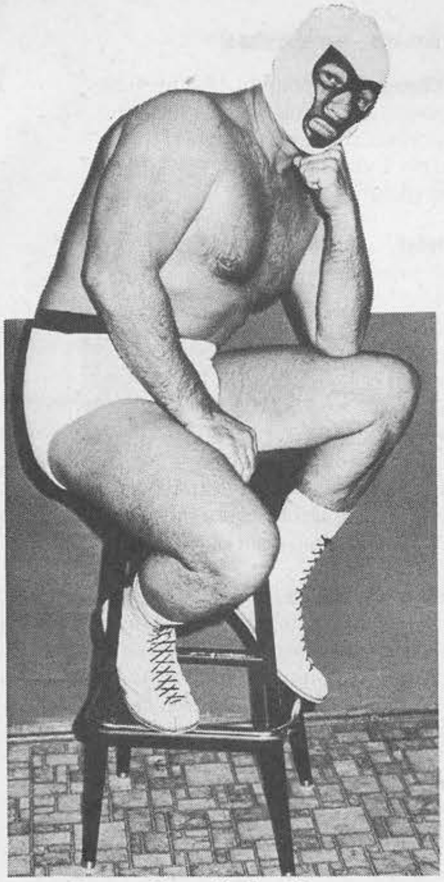


90 Minutes Of Savage Hell (September) For years, Victor Rivera and John Tolos had been embroiled in the sport's bloodiest feud. A 90-minute match designed to settle the rivalry once and for all actually settled nothing. Both men withstood repeated pencil and chair attacks and were finally dragged away from one another by policemen who reported that both of the exhausted wrestlers were "weak as a kitten."

"Please Don't Hurt His Face!" (November) Rick Martel's female fans pleaded with wrestlers around to world to leave Martel's "perfect, inspiring face" intact. Seventeen years later, Martel still has a mug sweet enough to warrant the moniker, "The Model."

$5,000 On Top Of A Pole (December) Twelve wrestlers battled for a $5,000 check that was stuck to the top of a 15-foot pole. As the men attempted to shimmy up the pole, they were dragged down, often losing their trunks in the process. Nick Kozak became the crowd favorite as he narrowed the field by tossing one opponent after another out of the ring. Finally, Kozak and Lord Al Hays simultaneously fell from the ring, leaving Andre the Giant alone to grab the check. Andre showed inspiring sportsmanship when he called Kozak back into the ring to split the prize.

1975



Wrestler of the Year
Mr. Wrestling II

Match of the Year
Bruno Sammartino vs. Spiros Arion

Tag Team of the Year
Ole & Gene Anderson

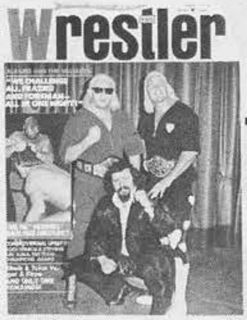
Stories of the year

Sheik Burns Referee "Red Shoes" Dugan!!! (January) This time The Sheik went too far. It's bad enough throwing fire at an opposing wrestler, but when you hit a referee, that's another story. The Sheik was wrestling Pampero Firpo when referee Johnny "Red Shoes" Dugan was caught in the crossfire of a burning projectile and seriously injured. The sport called for The Sheik's ban, but the madman from Lebanon got off with a slap on the wrist.

The Night Red Bastien Nearly Died! (March) Immobilized by a savage kick to his back, Bastien lay on the canvas while El Gran Markus climbed the ropes, intent on finishing off Red. But Jose Lothario rushed to ringside and pulled the helpless wrestler through the ropes. Lothario then kept Markus at bay while Bastien was helped to the locker room.

The $10,000 Jim Dillon Can't Give Away! (March) Ernie Ladd was the latest wrestler to try for the $10,000 bounty placed on Dick Murdoch's head by future Four Horsemen manager Jim Dillon—and the latest to fail. Ladd found himself trapped in a Boston crab and Dillon got the "Big Cat" DQ'd when he hit Murdoch with a chair.

Bockwinkel & Stevens Are AWA Tag Team Champions Again! (April) Nick Bockwinkel and Ray Stevens won the AWA tag title for the second time, defeating Billy Robinson and Crusher with the help of manager Bobby Heenan. Heenan snuck up behind Crusher and hit him in the head with brass knuckles, setting up the victory for his men.



1,200 Pounds Of Anger And Sorrow (April) The friendship between wrestling's 600-pound men, Haystacks Calhoun and Man Mountain Mike, ended in ugly fashion. Rumors were flying that Mike had resorted to dirty tactics. Calhoun flew to California and was angered when Mike refused a meeting. They wrestled to a double-disqualification in a double-reinforced ring.

Battleground, Memphis! (June) For 10 years, Jackie Fargo was the "King of Memphis." But Jerry Lawler lifted that "title" when he defeated Fargo. The two feuded and fans tured out in droves. Who won? Well, 16 years later, Lawler is *still* the "King of Memphis"!

Jack Brisco Loses NWA Title To Baba The Giant (June) Jack Brisco termed it "the most miserable week in my life," but it could have been worse. Brisco traveled to Japan and lost his NWA heavyweight championship to Japan's Shohei Baba. Three nights later, he lost a rematch. Fortunately for Brisco and his fans, he was able to regain his belt in their third match, just before the conclusion of his Oriental tour.

What Changed Don Muraco Into A Mad Dog? (June) One week after having his face kicked into red jelly by Mad Dog Vachon, fan favorite Muraco began to undergo an ugly change. He had the fans' support when he broke the rules seeking revenge against his attacker, but soon he discovered that such behavior was a shortcut to success. He went on to his greatest successes as a feared rulebreaker.

The Night Oliver Humperdink Nearly Lost An Eye! (September) In what was called "wrestling's most sickening moment," Sir Oliver Humperdink, manager of the Hollywood Blonds, had his eye nearly gouged out by Louis Tillet. The weapon was the same plastic knife used by Humperdink moments earlier, when he attacked Tillet at the end of the match.

Tag Team of the Year
The Executioners

1976

Stories of the year

The Magnificent Battle Of The Champions (March) All-time greats Lou Thesz and Antonio Inoki displayed all of their famous scientific abilities in this classic in Japan. Antonino Rocca was assigned to be special referee, but he had little to do. Inoki dropped the first fall, but took two straight for the win.

Verne Gagne Loses The AWA Title! (March) The champion lost his belt to Nick Bockwinkel when he was slugged in the back by Bockwinkel's manager of the day, Bobby Duncum. Referee Paul Perschmann, a rulebreaker and a friend of Bockwinkel's, helped make sure the decision held.

Superstar Graham Destroys Bruno Sammartino (April) Before 22,094 in New York's Madison Square Garden, Graham won by countout when referee Dick Kroll mistakenly counted the champ out of the ring after 10 seconds instead of the required 20. Graham had dominated the match—and even won a battle of bearhugs.

Terry Funk Brings The NWA Belt Back Home (April) When Dory Funk Jr. could not make airline connections in time to wrestle his scheduled match against NWA champion Jack Brisco, Terry Funk offered to substitute and the champ agreed. Big mistake. Funk countered Brisco's figure-four attempt and applied a cradle to take the title in 23:33.

"The Doctors Told Me I'd Never Wrestle Again" (August) Bruno Sammartino suffered a fractured sixth vertebra (i.e. a broken neck) when he was slammed by Stan Hansen's foreign object-enhanced "lariat." In this *Wrestler* exclusive, written by Sammartino while lying in a hospital bed, Bruno vowed to overcome the odds and return to the sport he loves.

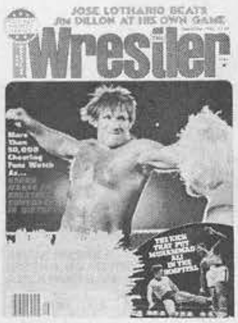
Match of the Year
Bruno Sammartino vs. Stan Hansen

Andre The Giant vs. Terry Funk . . . For The NWA Title (August) Before the first of the few world title matches he would wrestle in his career, Andre was admittedly nervous. The match unfolded at a tentative pace, with each man showing great respect for the other. But it soon evolved into a whirlwind of action. Andre was disqualified when he hurled Funk over the top rope.

Bruno Makes the Greatest Comeback In History! (September) Sammartino gained revenge and thrilled 50,000 fans at Shea Stadium by battering Stan Hansen. Sammartino avoided Hansen's attempt at yet another "lariat" (had he connected on Bruno's neck, the champion's career would likely have been over) and beat Hansen so badly, the challenger jumped out of the ring and fled.

The Night The Wrestlers Conquered The Boxers (September) In a match viewed worldwide on closed-circuit TV, Antonio Inoki frustrated Muhammad Ali by repeatedly falling to the canvas and peppering Ali's legs with kicks. Inoki refused to get to his feet, thus depriving boxing's heavyweight champ of a chance to land any straight-ahead punches. The match was declared a draw. In the supporting bout, Andre the Giant thrashed heavyweight contender Chuck Wepner.

Wrestler of the Year
Terry Funk

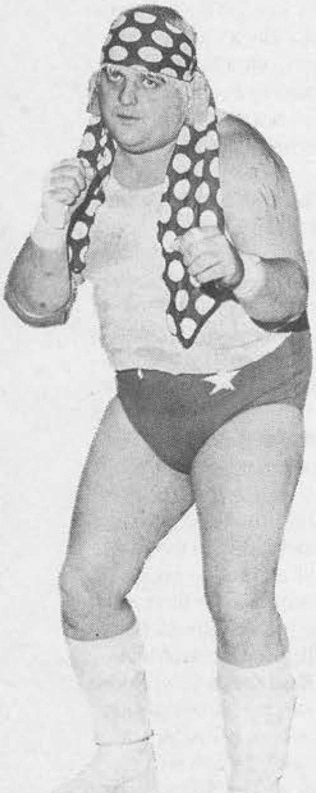


Bob Backlund: The Rookie Who Wears A Championship Belt (September) In his first year as professional, Backlund skyrocketed to contendership and then defeated veteran Harley Race for the Missouri state championship. On February 20, 1978, Backlund would win the WWF title from Superstar Graham and go on to wear the belt for nearly six years.

Now The Whole AWA Belongs To Bobby Heenan (December) Heenan already managed AWA champion Nick Bockwinkel. After guiding Blackjack Lanza and Bobby Duncum to victory over Crusher and Bruiser for the tag team belts, "The Brain" was in total control of the federation.

Tag Team of the Year
Ole & Gene Anderson

1977

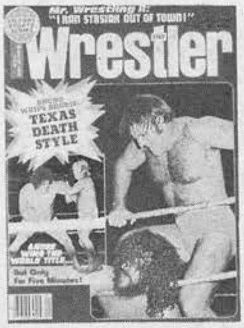


Wrestler of the Year
Dusty Rhodes

Match of the Year
Superstar Graham vs. Bruno Sammartino

Stories of the year

Bruno Whips Brody—Texas Death Style (January) A month before, Bruiser Brody had scored a rare victory over Bruno Sammartino, but he did not receive the WWF title because it was determined that Bruno's leg was on the ropes when he was pinned. In the rematch, fought Texas death style, Bruno tore apart the tough Brody and walked away the convincing winner.



The Andersons: "$100,000 To Any Team That Beats Us!" (March) Ole and Gene Anderson, trying to attract "some real competition," announced their offer, but never was anything stated in a contract. "Our word is our bond," said Ole. Believe us: Nobody ever expected to be paid.

Ric Flair: Captured In The Clutches Of The Sophomore Jinx (April) After a sensational rookie year, Flair found out that life in this sport isn't all fun and games. He spent most of his time alone, leery of what tomorrow would bring. Obviously, the jinx would wear off. Flair would win the NWA title in 1981, the first of seven times he would accomplish that feat.

Mil Mascaras Conquers New York! (May) An overflow crowd jammed into Madison Square Garden to see Mascaras, the first man who was allowed to wear a mask in New York, defeat an overmatched Doug Gilbert.

The Savage Strap Match Between Superstar Graham And Dusty Rhodes (June) Dusty Rhodes begged for this match, and Superstar Graham's ego wouldn't let him turn it down. The two battled it out from both ends of a leather strap. Graham dragged Rhodes past two ringposts, but Rhodes rolled out of the ring, gained control, and dragged Graham past all four posts while outside the ring.

The Marathon Tournament For Title Glory (June) Sixteen wrestlers competed in a tournament for the Florida championship after the commissioners stripped Superstar Graham of his title. Steve Keirn and Buddy Wolf survived the first three rounds and battled for the title. Using what were described as "reprehensible tactics," Wolf emerged victorious.

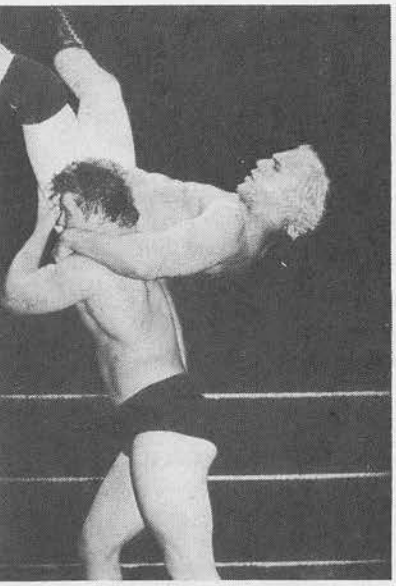
Billy Graham Wins The WWF Title From Bruno Sammartino (August) In what was called "the upset of the century," Superstar Graham defeated Sammartino, ending Bruno's second WWF title reign. Graham was in trouble against the ropes when the referee ordered Bruno to halt his attack. When Bruno raised his arms to show compliance, Graham took the advantage and went on to pin Bruno with his feet on the ropes.

Pat Patterson's Shocking Change (September) Once a crowd favorite, Patterson incurred the wrath of the fans with his treacherous tactics. Far from the cheering fans in Northern California, Patterson fulfilled his dream of wrestling at Madison Square Garden and then moved on to Florida. The fans despised him everywhere he went.

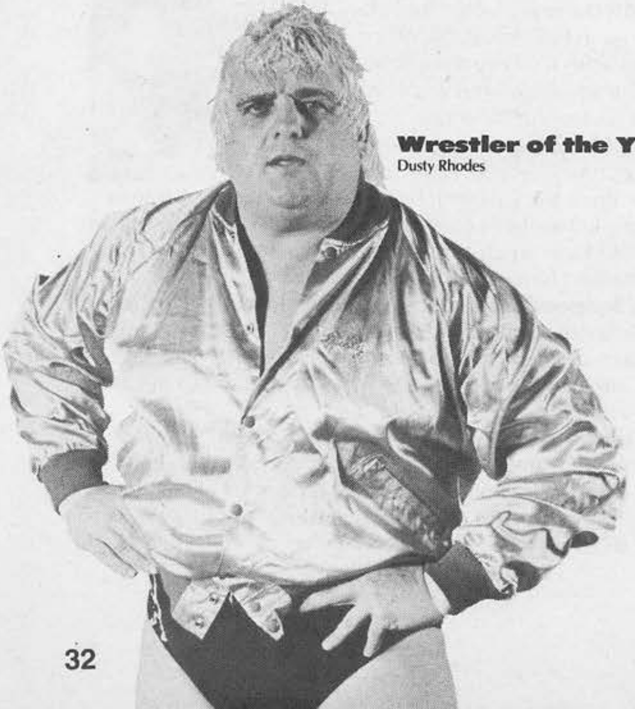
Bobby Heenan Suspended! (October) Manager Bobby Heenan was suspended indefinitely by the AWA for smacking Greg Gagne over the head with a chair after a match. Heenan claimed self-defense. "The guy goes after me," said Heenan. "The guy was so out of control he ran right into the chair."

Gagne And Brunzell Win The AWA Tag Team Title! (November) Greg Gagne and Jim Brunzell, two of the most popular men in the federation, received overwhelming fan support as they eliminated the nefarious Bobby Duncum and Blackjack Lanza. Gagne's sleeperhold on Lanza did the trick.

Tag Team of the Year
Paul Jones & Rick Steamboat



Match of the Year
Bob Backlund vs. Superstar Graham



Wrestler of the Year
Dusty Rhodes

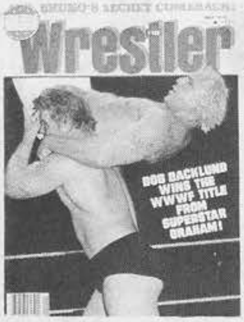
1978

Stories of the year

Tanaka And Fuji—Champions Again (January) The rulebreaking team of Prof. Toru Tanaka and Mr. Fuji used illegal maneuvers to defeat Tony Garea and Larry Zbyszko and capture their third WWF World tag team title. Few teams were willing to challenge the dangerous champions, who would do anything to win, and who ended more than their share of wrestling careers.

Lou Albano—Coward Of The Year (February) Albano earned this dubious distinction with a series of sneak-attacks and a wide variety of cheating tactics. The manager fought gamely with foreign objects when his team's foes were badly weakened, but when the odds were even, Lou was sure to run.

Star Wars! (February) WWF champion Superstar Graham defended his title against top contender Dusty Rhodes in a sold-out Madison Square Garden. As the crowd's cheers reached almost deafening levels, the action spilled in and out of the ring and both men soon wore a veil of blood. Finally, the pair collided, and both of the exhausted competitors fell to the canvas. Graham regained his strength first and crawled over to cover Dusty for the pin.



Ken Patera—World's Strongest Man! (March) Despite a badly injured back, Patera placed third in the nationally televised *World's Strongest Man Competition*. That Ken was able to stay close to eventual winner Bruce Wilhelm was testimony to his phenomenal strength as well as his ability to withstand pain.

Bob Backlund Wins The WWF Title From Superstar Graham! (May) Graham's reign came to an end in 14:51 of gritty wrestling at Madison Square Garden. Backlund dominated the match and sent Graham into convulsions with his title-winning move, the atomic spinebreaker. Graham actually had his foot draped over the rope when Backlund registered the decisive pin, but the referee didn't see it. Most fans, happy to see Graham dethroned, weren't complaining.

Should The AWA Strip Nick Bockwinkel Of The Title? (May) The AWA's top championship contenders were furious that Bockwinkel spent most of his time wrestling WWF and NWA competitors. Bockwinkel, egged on by manager Bobby Heenan, said he was simply seeking outside competition because there wasn't enough talent in the AWA.

Bruno's Secret Comeback! (May) Two-time WWF champion Bruno Sammartino decided to retire from wrestling to spend more time with his family. But Bruno couldn't stay away from the mat. He snuck back into the sport by wrestling with longtime friend Bruiser in the WWA.

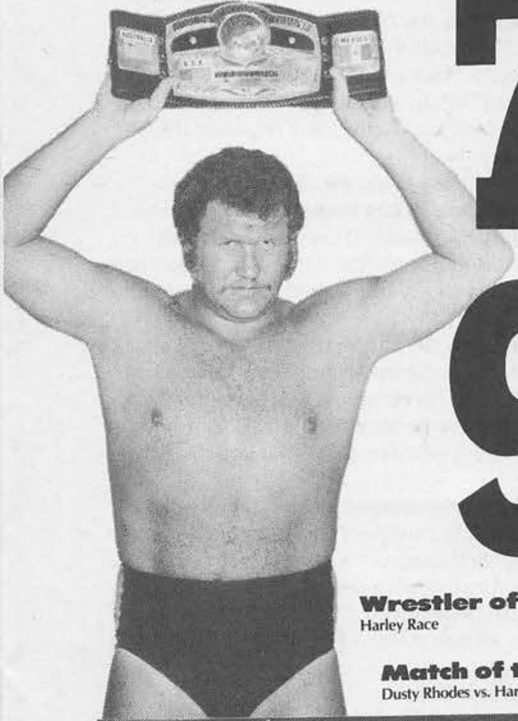
Andre's Army Declares Bloody War On The Bad Guys (July) Andre the Giant asked his fellow scientific wrestlers to join his "holy crusade" against the rulebreakers. Big names like Bob Backlund, Mil Mascaras, and Chief Jay Strongbow immediately pledged their allegiance to Andre's cause, while known cheaters like Ric Flair and Nick Bockwinkel sneered at their good intentions.

Dusty Rhodes Wins The Antonino Rocca Memorial Award! (July) The "American Dream" was the first recipient of this award, given by *The Wrestler* to the most popular wrestler never to hold a belt. In a surprisingly humble acceptance speech, Rhodes was choked with emotion as he remembered Rocca, saying: "He was such an inspiration to me. I just hope I'm worthy of this honor."

The Night They Sacrificed Poor Tommy Rich (November) Rookie Rich underwent an initiation of sorts when he was pitted against the brutal Sheik. Though he survived the ordeal, Rich was beaten to a bloody pulp by the man almost everyone was afraid to face. Perhaps Rich learned something from it all: He became the NWA World champion when he beat Harley Race on April 27, 1981.

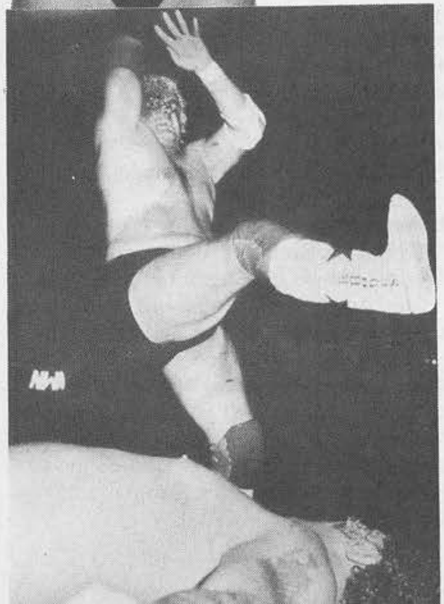
1979

Tag Team of the Year
Ivan Putski & Tito Santana



Wrestler of the Year
Harley Race

Match of the Year
Dusty Rhodes vs. Harley Race

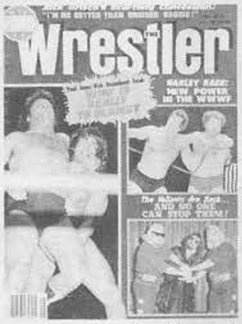


Stories of the year

Will The Bloodshed Ever End? (January) The longer the feud between Superstar Graham and Dusty Rhodes wore on, the bloodier it became. In this chapter of their brutal saga, Rhodes beat Graham in a Texas bullrope match. Graham, who lost on a technicality, immediately demanded a rematch.

How Peter Maivia Became Wrestling's Most Hated Man (March) Soon after turning from fan favorite to rulebreaker, Chief Maivia began leaving a trail of battered bodies behind him. Maivia's transformation came at the hands of Fred Blassie, who coaxed Maivia into attacking Arnold Skaaland, Maivia's manager, and Bob Backlund, Maivia's once-beloved tag team partner.

Paul Jones' Shocking Betrayal Of Rick Steamboat (April) Feeling slighted by the media, the fans, and the higher-ups who determine the ranks of top contenders, Paul Jones resorted to rulebreaking. The ultimate decision to turn his back on the fans came when Jones won a tag team title with Rick Steamboat and, according to Jones, Steamboat got all the credit for the team's accomplishments. Jones vowed to get the recognition he felt he deserved and warned: "There'll be a lot of broken bodies on the road leading there."



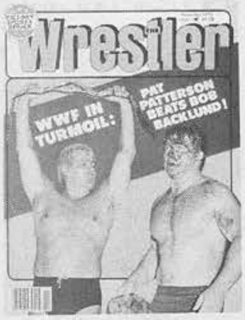
The Battle Of The Blackjacks (May) The rulebreaking pair of Blackjack Mulligan and Blackjack Lanza won many tag team titles, including the WWF belts in 1975. When Mulligan turned against the Blackjacks' former friends, Ric Flair and Greg Valentine, however, Lanza felt the name "Blackjack" was being disgraced, thereby leading to a battle between longtime friends.

Bruno Sammartino—Greatest Sports Legend (July) Bruno joined the list of outstanding sports personalities to grace Tom Seaver's television show, *Greatest Sports Legends.*

The Return Of A Legend (August) Buddy Rogers, the only man to win both the NWA and WWF world championships, returned to the ring after more than 10 years in retirement. Wrestling experts were impressed after watching Buddy resharpen his skills in Florida rings, but Rogers was never able to make good on his stated goal of regaining the NWA belt from Harley Race.

The Match That Changed Wrestling Forever! (August) For the first and only time, an AWA champion (Nick Bockwinkel) and a WWF champ (Bob Backlund) squared off. The encounter lived up to all the prematch hype and, after 39 minutes of aggressive brawling, the wrestlers simutaneously fell through the ropes in exhaustion.

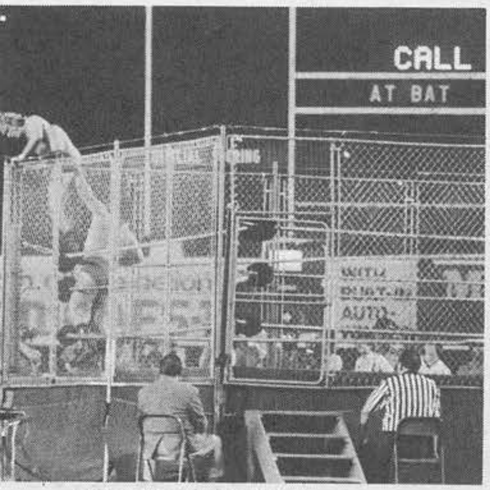
"I've Paid My Dues To be Called 'Bruiser' " (September) Bruiser Brody and Dick the Bruiser waged a war over rights to the intimidating moniker. They tried to settle things before an Indianapolis crowd that was decidedly in favor of Dick, the original Bruiser, but the outcome was a double-disqualification.



WWF In Turmoil: Pat Patterson Beats Bob Backlund! (November) Using brass knuckles, Patterson pummeled Backlund so brutally that ringside doctors were forced to stop the match. Even in defeat, Backlund retained his belt, causing Patterson to rail at the WWF and call Backlund a "paper champion."

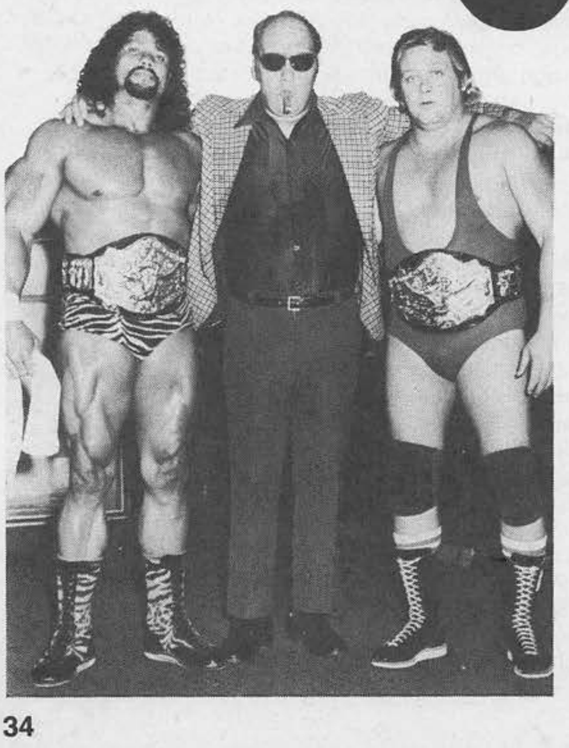
Millions Sob As Volkoff Attacks Bruno (December) Manager Freddie Blassie, jealous that Bruno Sammartino was referred to as the "Living Legend," joined with his powerful charge, Nikolai Volkoff, to mount a sneak-attack on television commentator Sammartino. Bruno had agreed to answer Volkoff's claims of strength in an arm-wrestling match. But before the event could unfold, Blassie slammed Bruno across the face with his cane and the attack was on.

Wrestler of the Year
Bob Backlund



Match of the Year
Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko

Tag Team of the Year
Jimmy Snuka, Manager Gene Anderson, & Ray Stevens



1980

Stories of the year

Three-Time Champion Harley Race: Will History Say He's The Greatest? (January) A *Wrestler* survey of several top wrestlers and managers revealed, not surprisingly, a variety of answers. The question, however, was asked a bit too soon: Race went on to become a *seven-time* NWA champion with an undisputable spot among the all-time greats.

Dundee vs. Lawler: How Ambition Destroyed A Friendship (January) Jerry Lawler's close friendship with Bill Dundee dissolved when Dundee accepted a title bout against Nick Bockwinkel—a match Lawler coveted. Dundee tried to hold on to his beloved pal, and even brought an olive branch to the ring when the two met. But Lawler was enraged beyond reconciliation and he battered his ex-buddy with a chain.

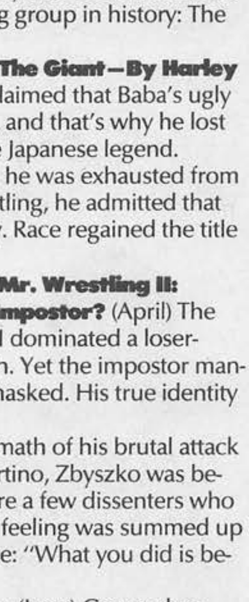
Why The Experts Say Ric Flair's Days As A Fan Favorite Are Over (February) Knowledgeable opinions said that Flair and Rick Steamboat were too volatile a tag team, and that the "Nature Boy" was destined to turn rulebreaker. The predictions were right. Flair went on to capture seven World titles primarily as a rulebreaker, and also helped form the most lethal rulebreaking group in history: The Four Horsemen.

Why I Lost To Baba The Giant—By Harley Race (April) Race claimed that Baba's ugly face distracted him, and that's why he lost his NWA belt to the Japanese legend. Though Harley said he was exhausted from almost nightly wrestling, he admitted that Baba beat him fairly. Race regained the title six days later.

Mr. Wrestling II vs. Mr. Wrestling II: Which One Is The Impostor? (April) The real Mr. Wrestling II dominated a loser-must-unmask match. Yet the impostor managed to flee the ring before being totally unmasked. His true identity was never discovered.

Letters To Larry Zbyszko (June) In the aftermath of his brutal attack on former mentor and friend, Bruno Sammartino, Zbyszko was besieged by letters of condemnation. There were a few dissenters who remained on Zbyszko's side, but the general feeling was summed up by Victor Abilli of Mansfield, Ohio, who wrote: "What you did is beyond forgiving, Larry."

The Shameful Compromise of Verne Gagne (June) Gagne abandoned his sturdy morals when he teamed with his longtime enemy—the vicious Mad Dog Vachon—and captured the AWA tag team title. Most stinging of all to Verne was the criticism he received from his dear son, Greg, who admitted, "I guess I'm a little ashamed."



Race vs. Mascaras: The Greatest Title Match In 25 Years (July) Mil Mascaras was nervous before his first-ever title bout against NWA champion Harley Race. But once the bell rang, Mascaras exploded with a series of flying maneuvers. In a classic battle of strength against speed, Race relied on his fine conditioning to withstand Mascaras' repeated attacks and retain the belt.

Bob Backlund: "I Fear Hulk Hogan!" (July) One of the most controversial stories in *The Wrestler's* history. Backlund, while admitting that the quote concerning Freddie Blassie's young-but-massive rulebreaker was accurate, later stated that he was quoted out of context and that he had tried to convey the message that he had a deep respect for Hogan's size and strength.

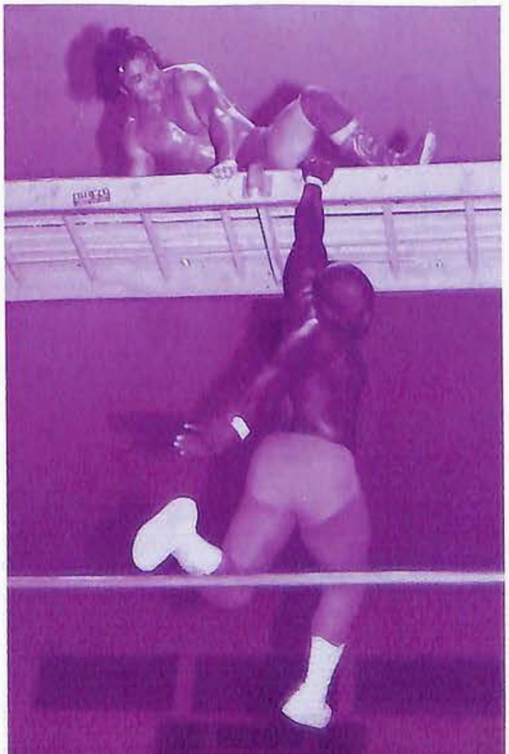
Special Edition: The Most Spectacular Wrestling Shows Of All Time! (December) The Showdown at Shea, The Last Tangle in Tampa, and The Superdome Spectacular combined to attract nearly 100,000 spectators. Match highlights included Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko (Shea), Dusty Rhodes vs. Harley Race (Tampa), and Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan (Shea and Superdome).

We can't relive the past, but it's fun to reflect on it. In celebration of our silver anniversary, *The Wrestler* takes great pride and pleasure in presenting . . .

THE MOST MEMORABLE PHOTOS OF THE PAST 25 YEARS

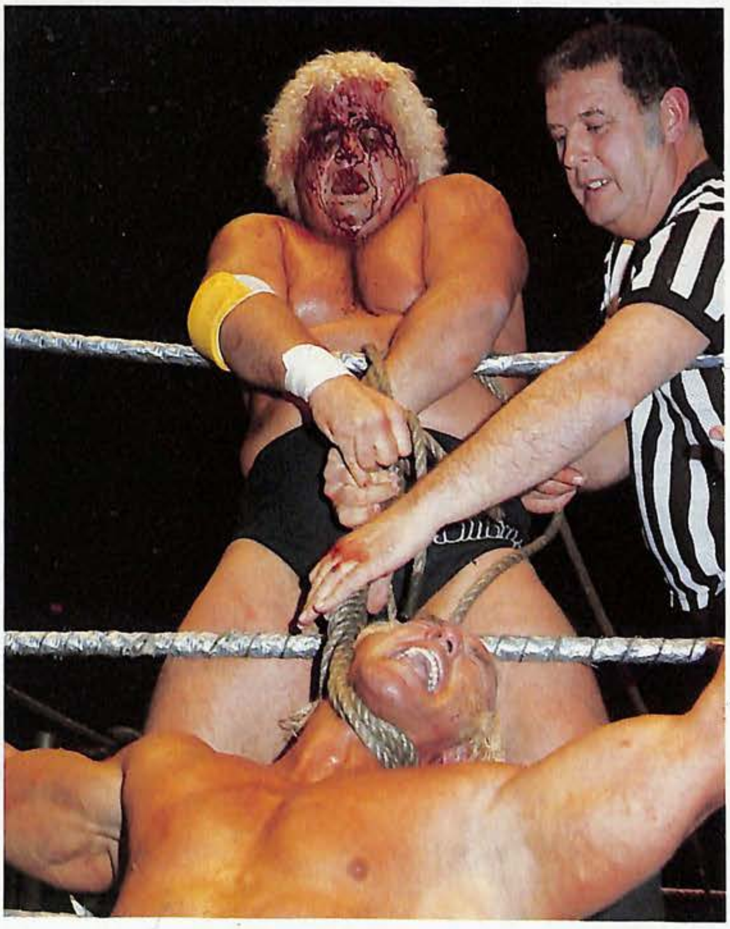
1989: After several aborted retirements, the brilliant Rick Steamboat lifted himself to immortality when he defeated Ric Flair for the WCW World title.

1982: Koko B. Ware holds on for dear life, but he knows he's about to lose the first-ever scaffold match to Bill Dundee. Koko would break his wrist after falling 13 feet to the mat.



1984: The Road Warriors seem quite at home on the streets of New York City.

1978: Dusty Rhodes tries to end more than Superstar Graham's WWF World title reign at Madison Square Garden.



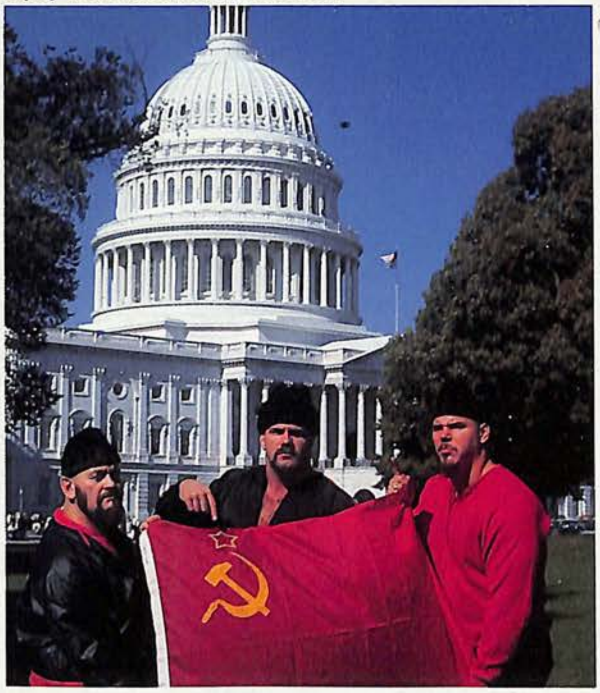
1972: "The Animal" is nabbed by police, foiling his still-unexplained attempt to Steele the show from Shea Stadium headliners Pedro Morales and Bruno Sammartino.

1982: In honor of Sam Muchnick. (L to R) Sam, Gene Kiniski, Dewey Robertson, Ox Baker, Pat O'Connor, Ric Flair, Dusty Rhodes, Verne Gagne, David Von Erich, Greg Valentine, and Ken Patera.

1973: John Tolos will not allow The Sheik's prayer ceremony to proceed uninterrupted.

1974: A unique perspective on the final moments of St. Louis' "Wrestle Royal," with Bobo Brazil (left), Ivan Koloff (center), Pat O'Connor (right), and Blackjack Lanza (bottom).

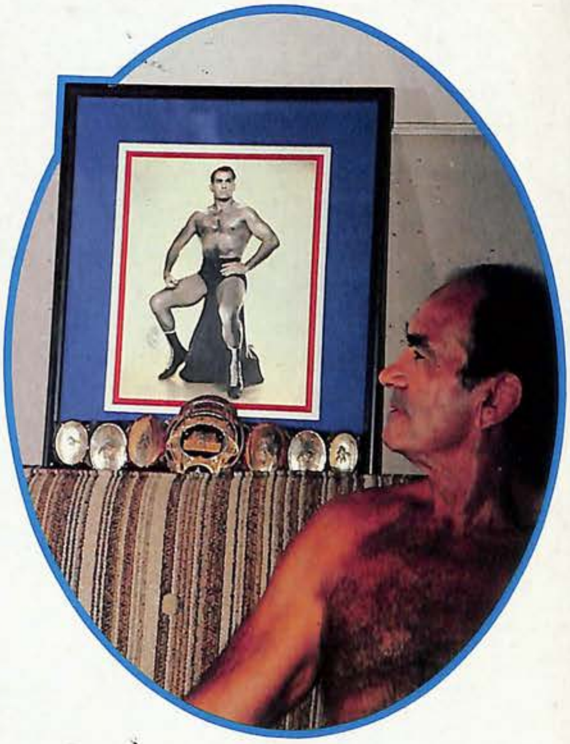
1985: Ivan Koloff, Nikita Koloff, and Krusher Khrushchev visit our nation's capital, Washington, DC. Would Americans be allowed to display the American flag in Moscow?



1986: Chris Adams is attended to after being blinded by a liquid thrown by Gino Hernandez (above). Eight days later, while Adams recuperated in England (right), Hernandez was found dead in his Dallas apartment.

1982: Timothy Flowers weds in a Las Vegas ring (above). 1985: Uncle Elmer's wedding is attended by Hulk Hogan and Tiny Tim (below). 1989: Could wrestling marriages result in mutant babies (right)?

1981: As a teenager, Paul E. Dangerously hung around legendary managers Fred Blassie, Lou Albano, and The Grand Wizard, picking their brains and learning the darker side of the sport.



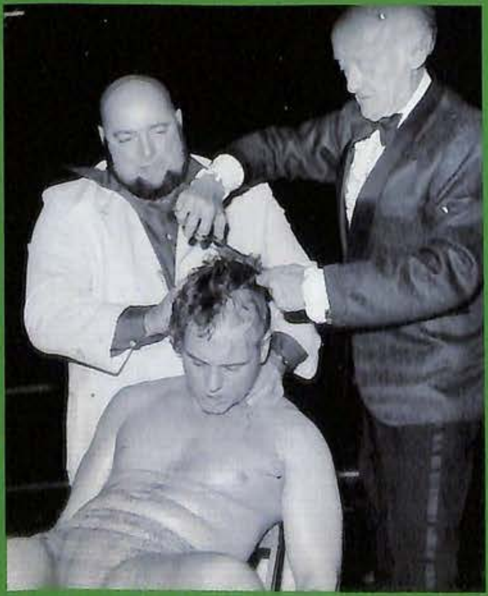
1982: Lou Thesz, who counts Father Time among his greatest victories, looks back to the year 1937, when he won his first of six NWA belts.

1988: Roddy Piper was a critical success in the science fiction thriller *They Live.*

1985: Rick Martel and Little T. 1973: Andre the Giant and Mike Pappas. (Get that man a chair!)

1969: Mil Mascaras' victory over Black Gordman gives him clipping privileges.

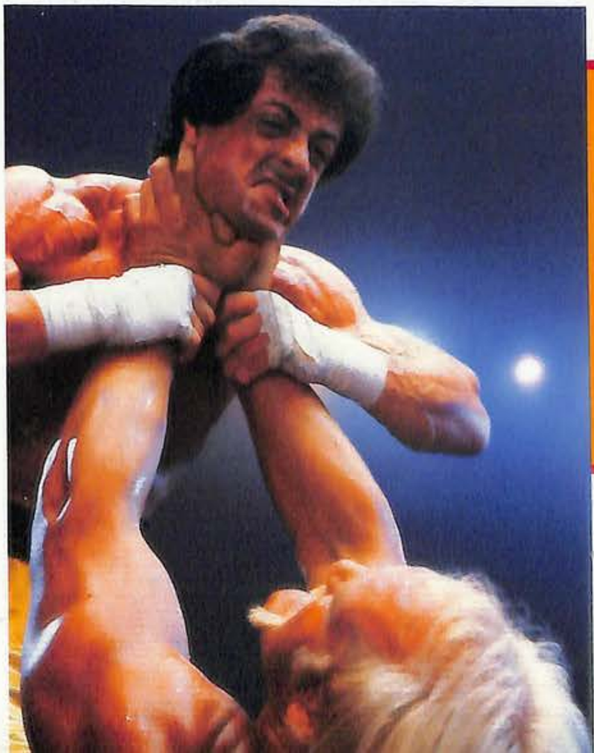
1973: John Tolos' hair is everywhere but on his head after a loss to Victor Rivera.



1976: Roddy Piper's too exhausted to protest his haircut after being beaten by Chavo Guerrero.

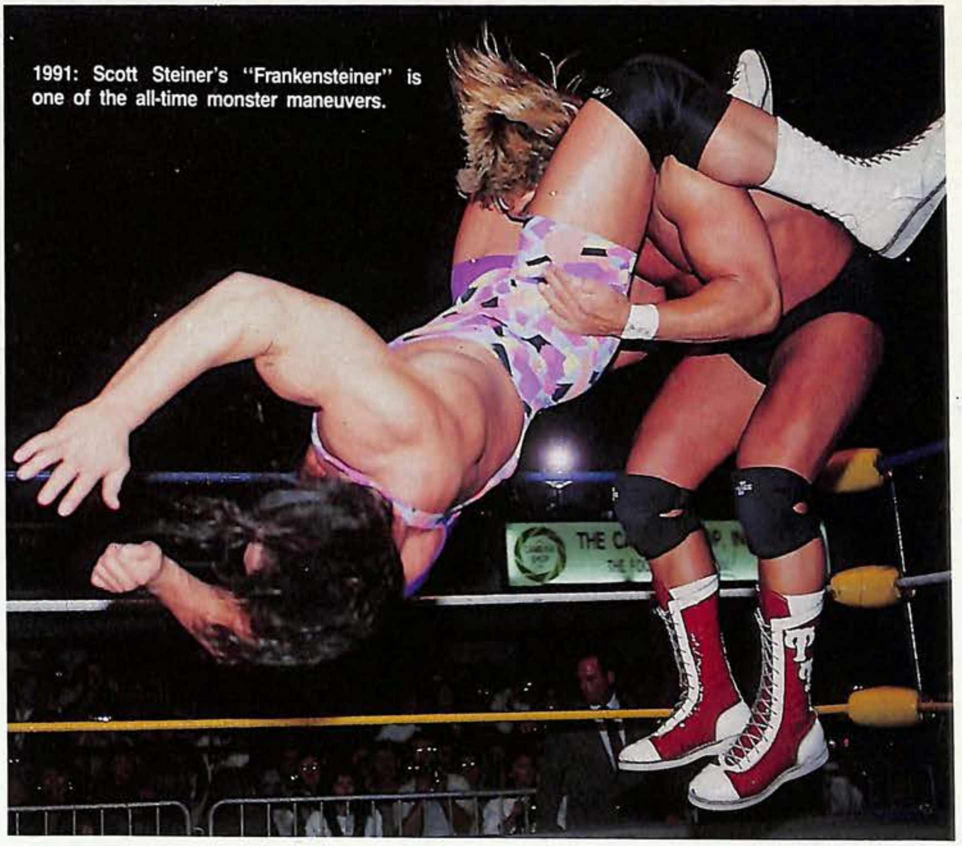
1976: Bruno Sammartino has plenty of time to contemplate revenge against Stan Hansen while convalescing in the hospital. Hansen, aided by a foreign object, broke the WWF champ's neck with a "lariat."

1982: Appearing on *Late Night With David Letterman*, comedian Andy Kaufman asks Jerry Lawler to apologize for injuring his neck in their match of three months earlier (above). Lawler has his own way of saying "I'm sorry" (right).

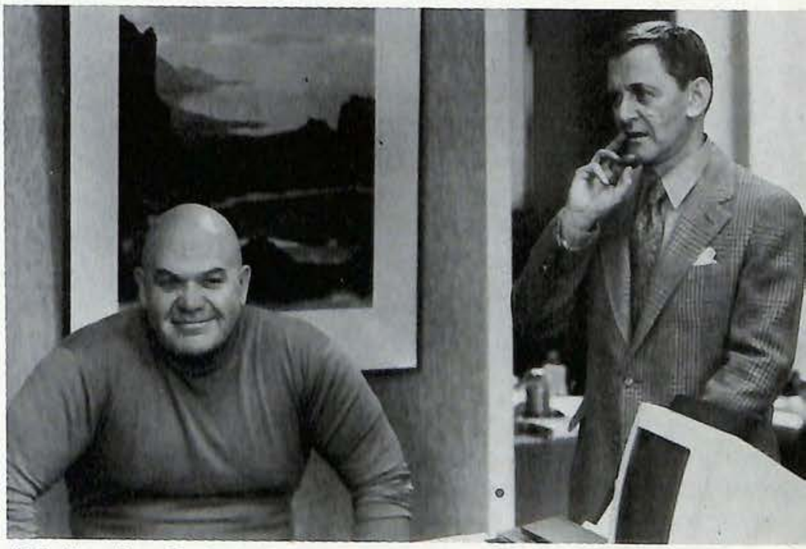


1982: Portraying "Thunderlips" in *Rocky III*, Hulk Hogan lifts Sylvester Stallone. It was Hogan's career, though, that got the big lift from the movie.

1978: President Jimmy Carter can't mask his excitement over meeting Mr. Wrestling II.

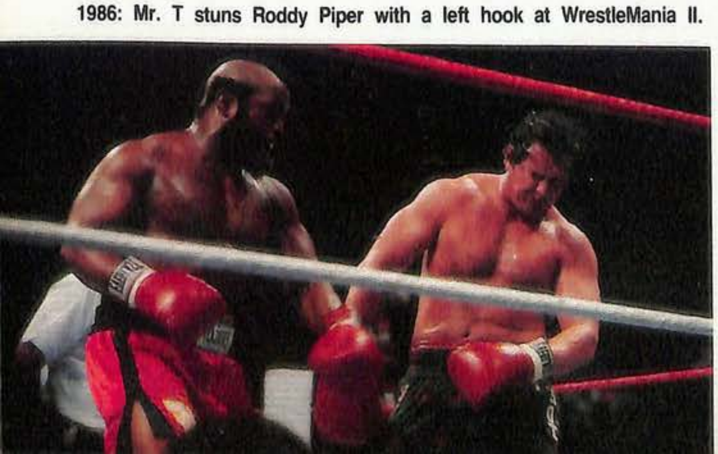


1991: Scott Steiner's "Frankensteiner" is one of the all-time monster maneuvers.

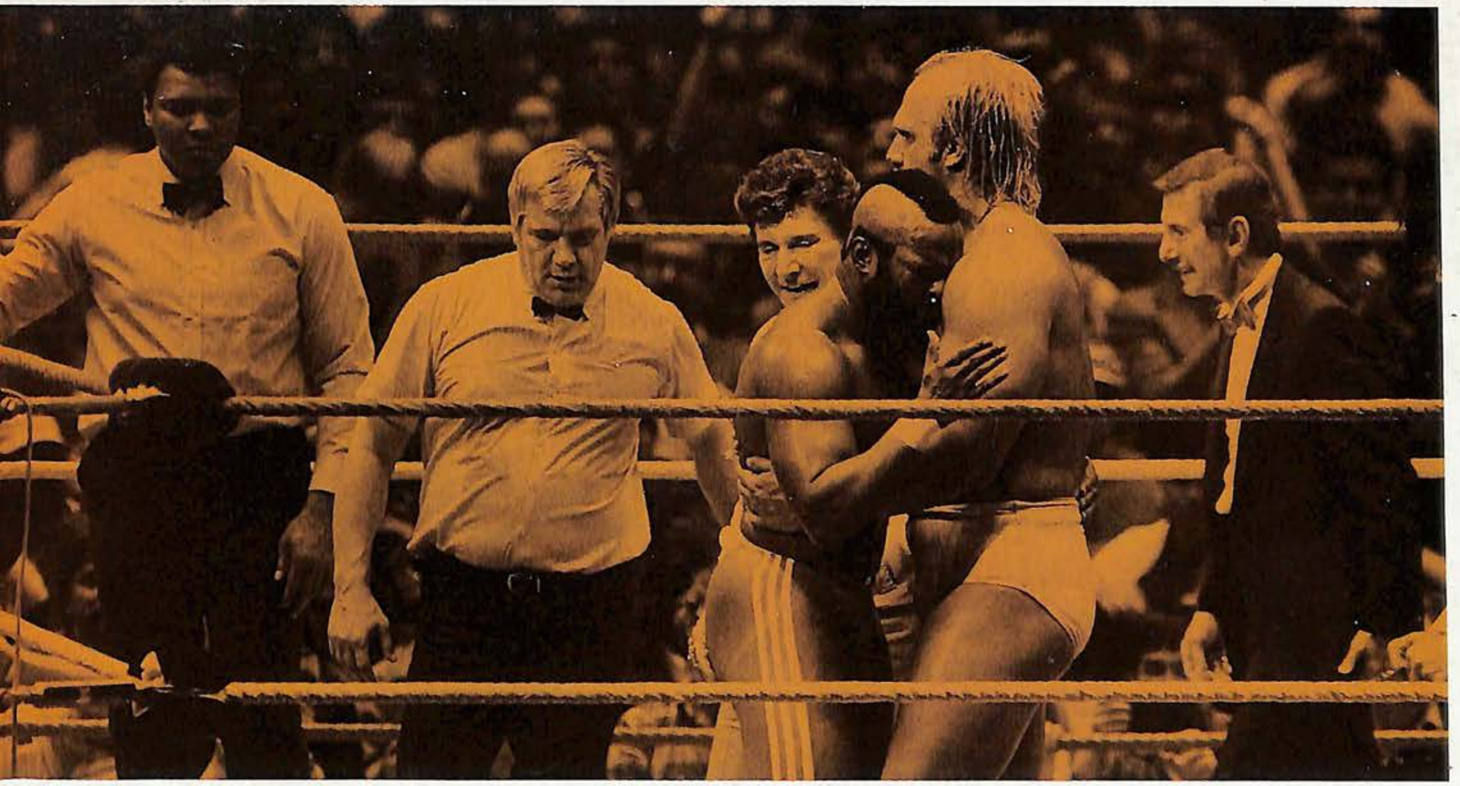


1988: King Kong Bundy (with *Married With Children* stars Ed O'Neill and Katey Sagal) and George "The Animal" Steele (with actor Tony Randall) are shining examples of how versatile pro wrestlers can be.

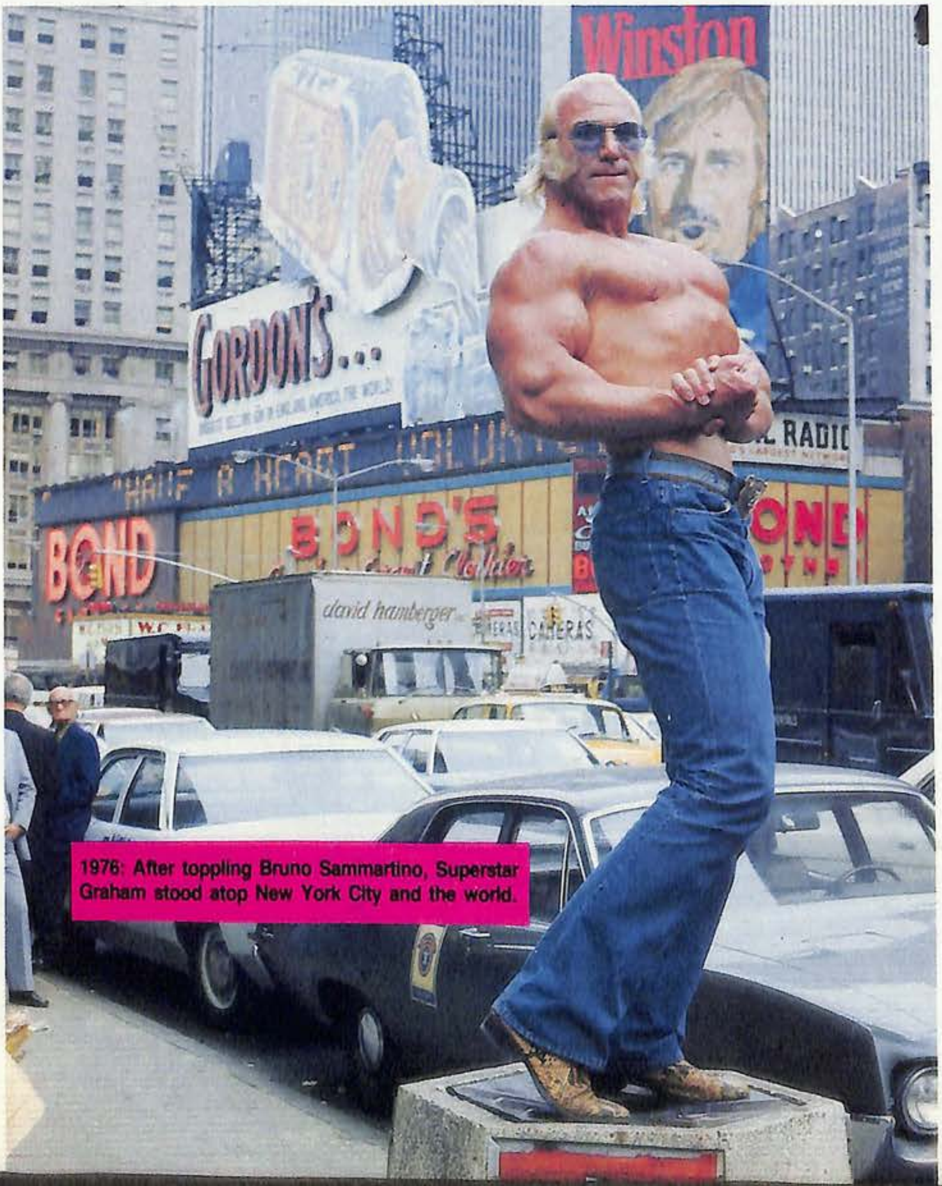
1986: Mr. T stuns Roddy Piper with a left hook at WrestleMania II.



1976: Muhammad Ali knows he doesn't match up with Andre the Giant.



1985: Mr. T falls exhaustedly into the arms of partner Hulk Hogan after their WrestleMania I victory over Roddy Piper and Paul Orndorff. Joining them in the ring are referees Muhammad Ali and Pat Patterson, timekeeper Liberace, and ring announcer Billy Martin.

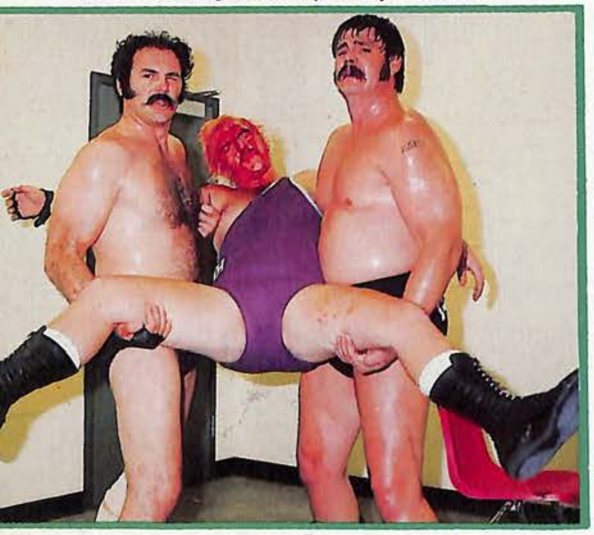


1976: After toppling Bruno Sammartino, Superstar Graham stood atop New York City and the world.

1975: Popular Darling Dagmar and Edsel Moreland made beautiful music together after their wedding in Columbia, South Carolina.

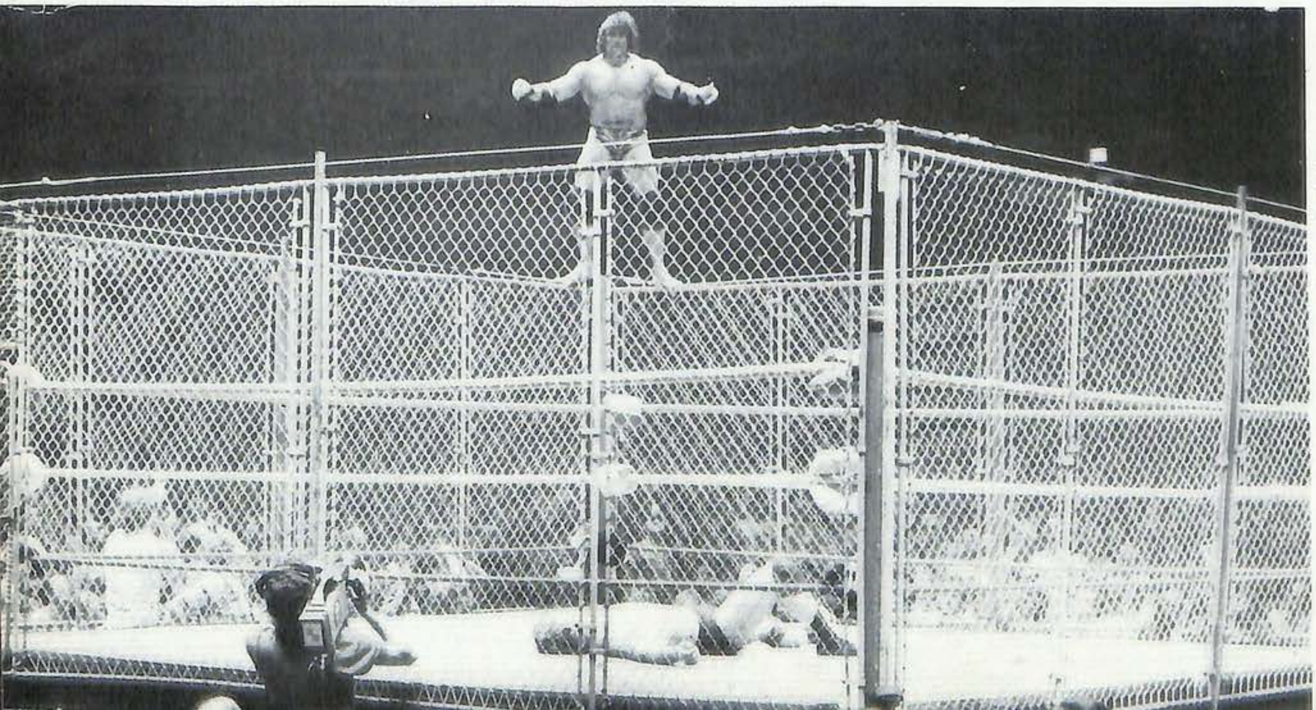
1973: Wildman Bull Curry has more hair above and between his eyes than Sky Low Low ever had on his head!

1990: Barry Windham is all smiles after pulling off the "Halloween Havoc Hoax" in which he disguised himself as Sting and purposely lost the WCW World title to Sid Vicious. Soon, Sting would wipe away that smirk.



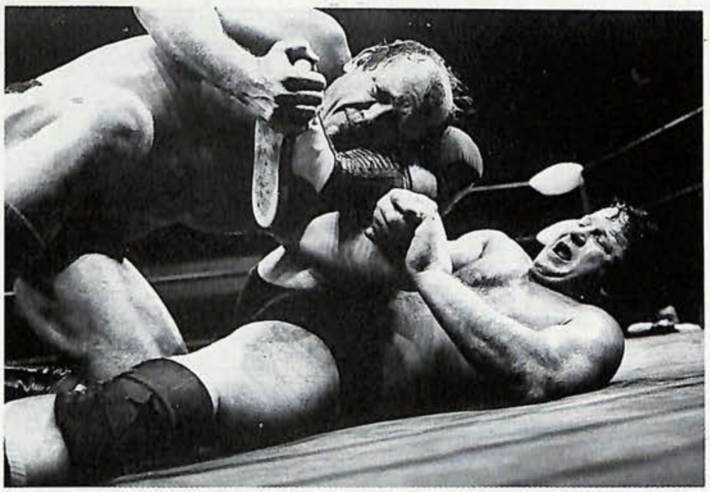
1972: Blackjack Mulligan and Blackjack Lanza had a bloody hard time convincing their manager, Bobby "The Brain" Heenan, to stay away from the action.

1984: The body of David Von Erich, a victim of acute enteritis, is lifted by Japanese wrestlers (top). 1987: Kevin Von Erich comforts his mother, Doris, at Mike Von Erich's funeral (above).

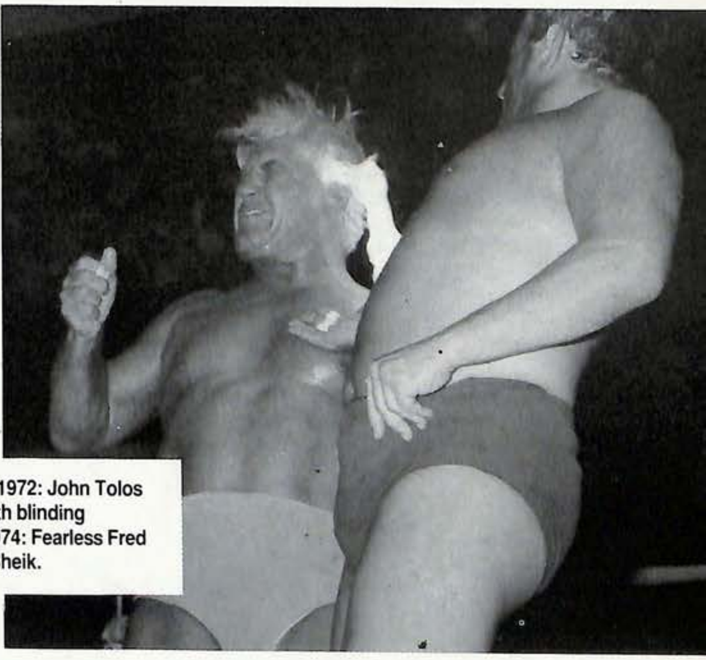


1982: Standing barefoot above the ring on top of a cage as steady as if he were on the mat, Superfly Snuka targets WWF champion Bob Backlund. The fact that he would miss did not detract from the courage of his efforts.

1981: When Terry and Dory Funk Jr. reached the finals of a tournament in Japan, they had no choice but to wrestle each other. Dory won in a match that was not entirely clean.



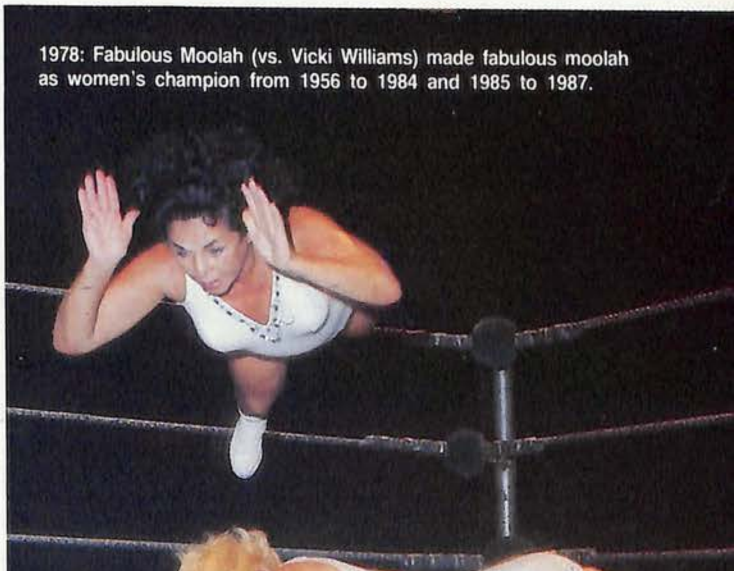
1972: The winner of Los Angeles' 22-man battle royal, Bruno Sammartino, won $11,000. The runner-up, Ripper Collins, is apparently not thrilled with the consolation prize.

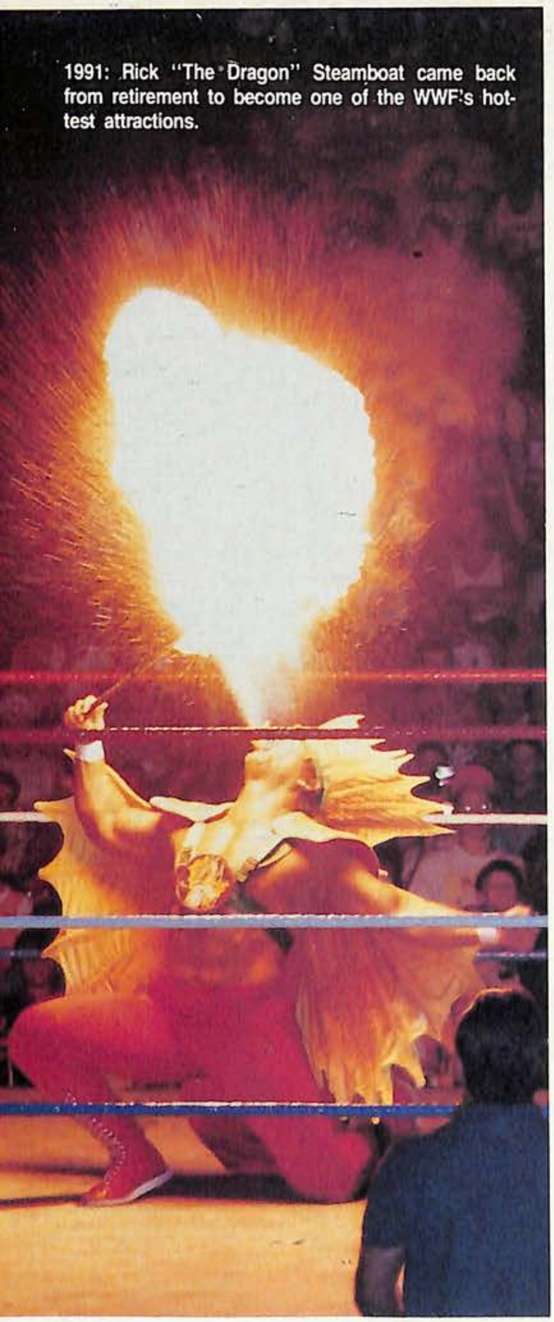


He shoulda ducked! 1972: John Tolos zaps Fred Blassie with blinding Monsel's Powder. 1974: Fearless Fred is scorched by The Sheik.

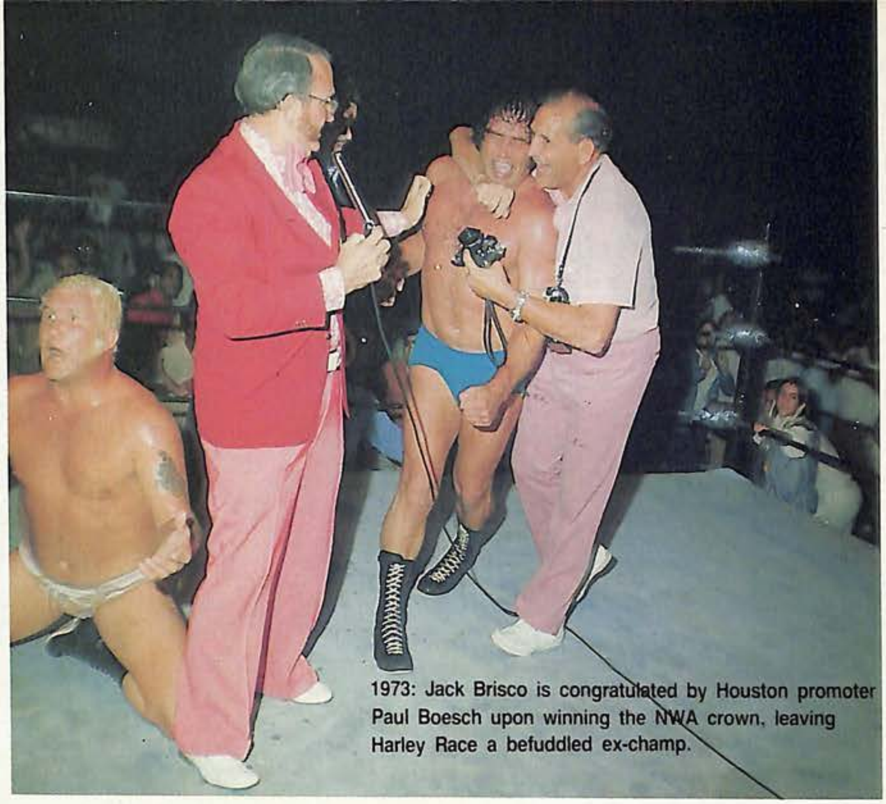
1976: Bruiser Brody elbowdrops Jose Gonzales. 1988: Jose Gonzales is charged with the murder of Bruiser Brody.

1978: Fabulous Moolah (vs. Vicki Williams) made fabulous moolah as women's champion from 1956 to 1984 and 1985 to 1987.



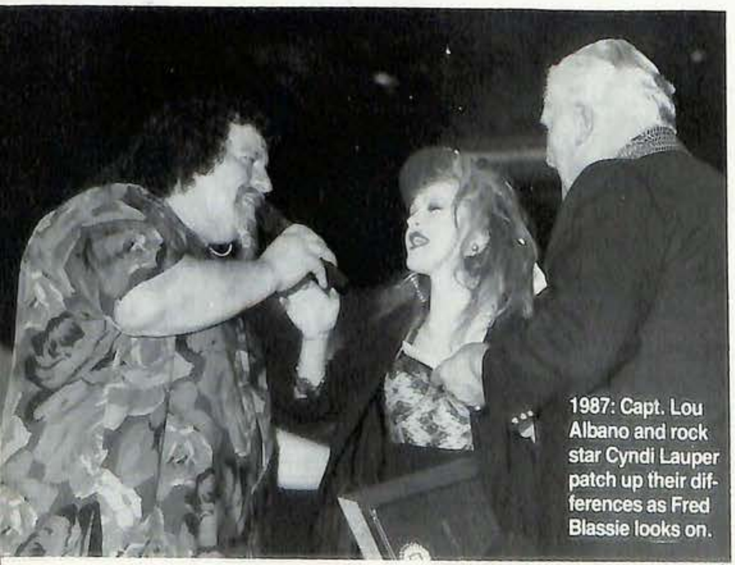


1991: Rick "The Dragon" Steamboat came back from retirement to become one of the WWF's hottest attractions.

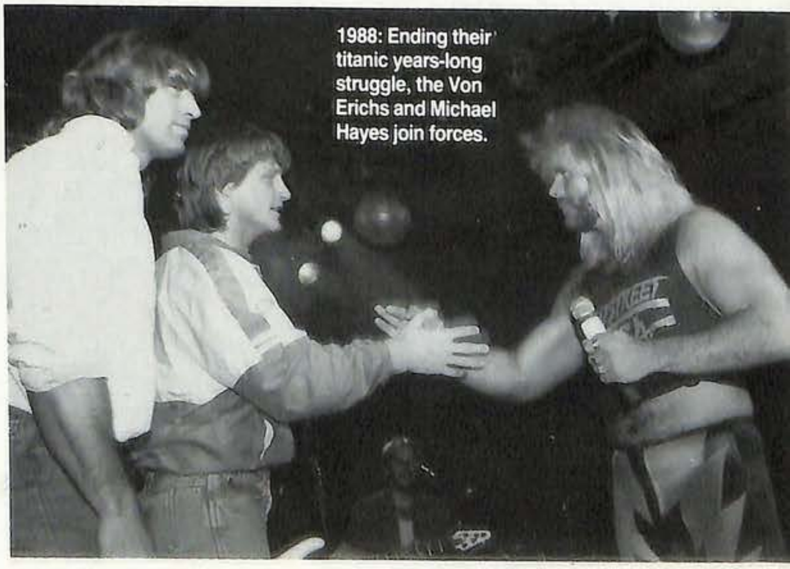


1973: Jack Brisco is congratulated by Houston promoter Paul Boesch upon winning the NWA crown, leaving Harley Race a befuddled ex-champ.

1976: Jerry Lewis gets the treatment from Verne Gagne, Chris Taylor, and Andre the Giant after a taping of *The Mike Douglas Show*.

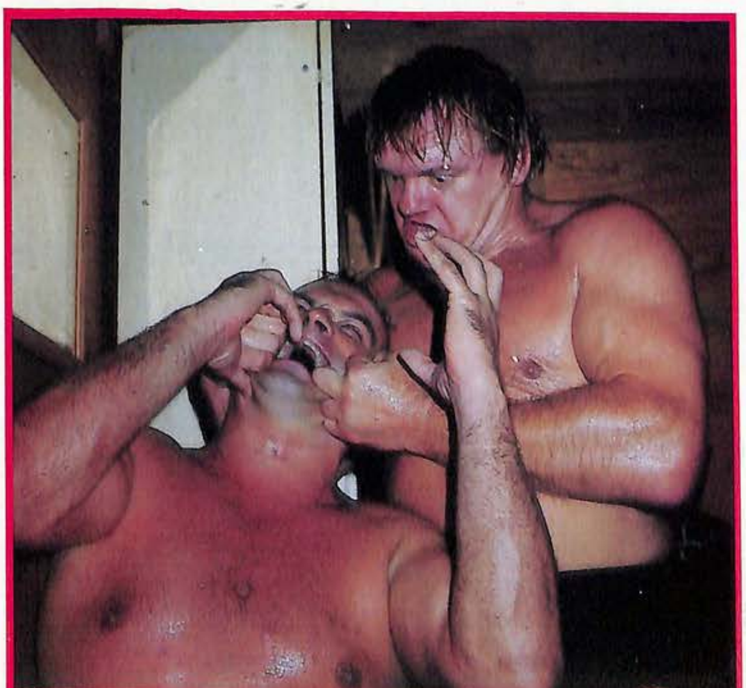


1987: Capt. Lou Albano and rock star Cyndi Lauper patch up their differences as Fred Blassie looks on.



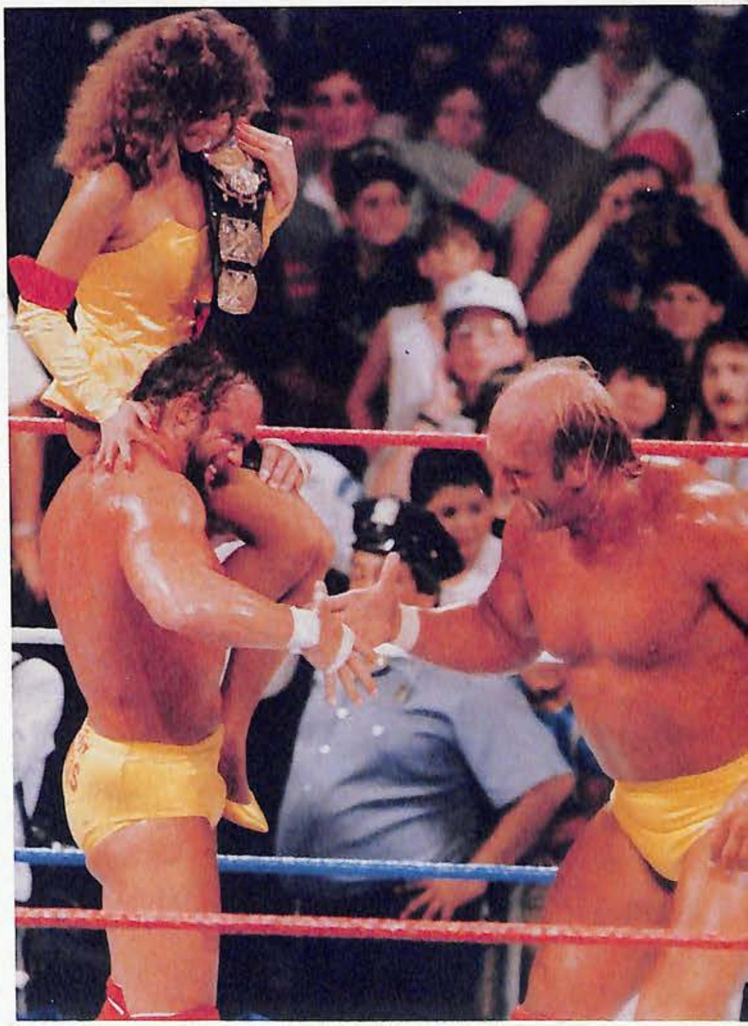
1988: Ending their titanic years-long struggle, the Von Erichs and Michael Hayes join forces.

1986: The remains of the Porsche Magnum T.A. crashed into a utility pole, ending the active career of one of the sport's most beloved stars.



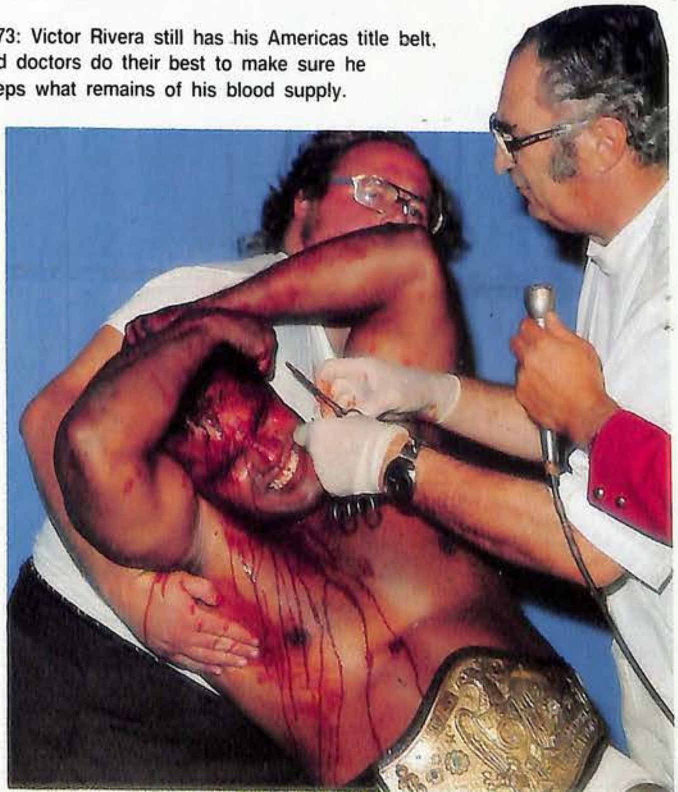
1972: "If the photographer says 'smile,' you smile," Johnny Valentine says to Stan Stasiak. Actually, this dressing room brawl was a very ugly incident and nothing to smile about.

1983: With a victory over Jim Garvin, David Von Erich wins the services of Garvin and his valet, Sunshine, as his "slaves" for a day.

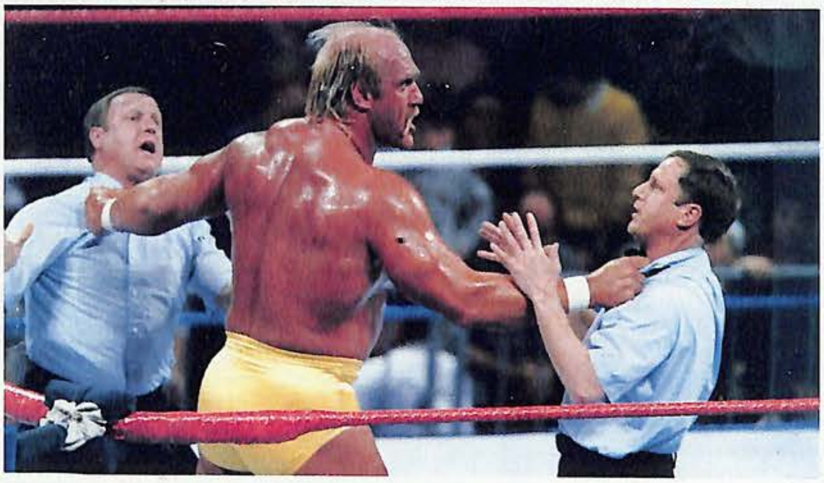


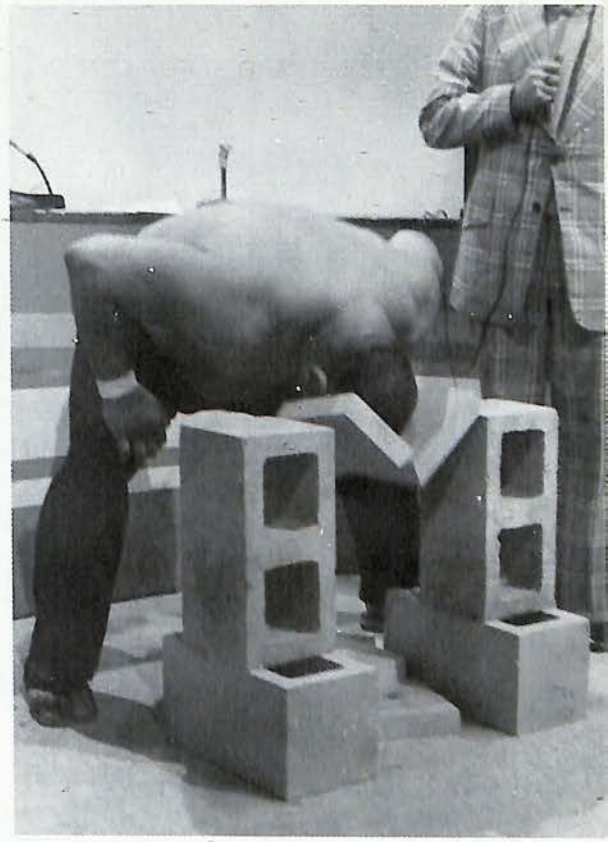
1988: The Megapowers, Randy Savage and Hulk Hogan, with Megawoman Elizabeth, celebrate their SummerSlam victory over Ted DiBiase and Andre the Giant at Madison Square Garden.

1973: Victor Rivera still has his Americas title belt, and doctors do their best to make sure he keeps what remains of his blood supply.



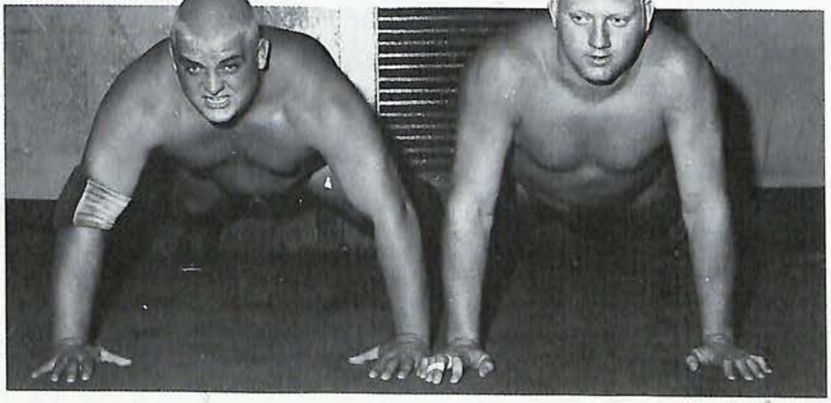
1988: Hulk Hogan is confused over which of the Hebner brothers to blame for his WWF title loss to Andre the Giant. The man who was truly to blame was Ted DiBiase.

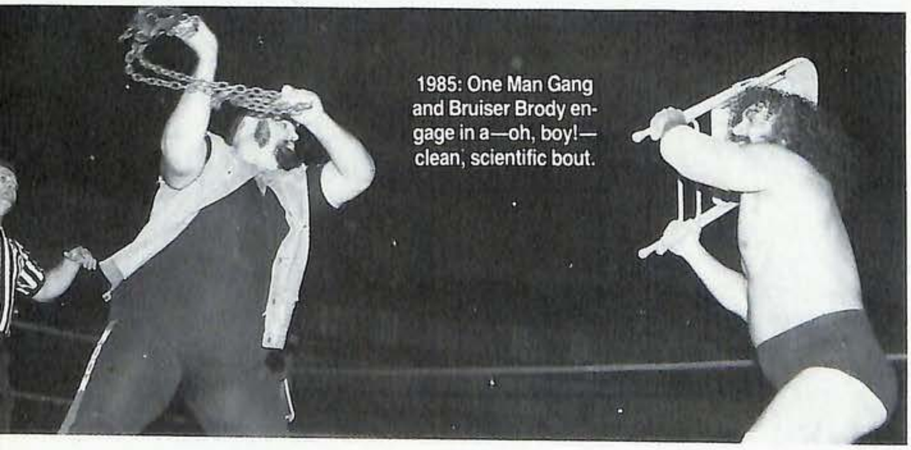




1975: Prof. Toru Tanaka lost a lot of potential opponents with such demonstrations.

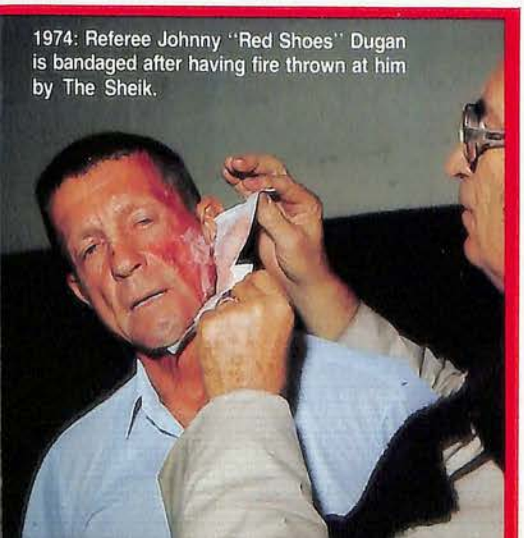
1970: The Outlaws Dusty Rhodes and Dick Murdoch, pushed their way up the tag team ranks with their aggressive rule-breaking style.





1985: One Man Gang and Bruiser Brody engage in a—oh, boy!—clean, scientific bout.

1972: Abdullah the Butcher apparently has never heard of salmonella!



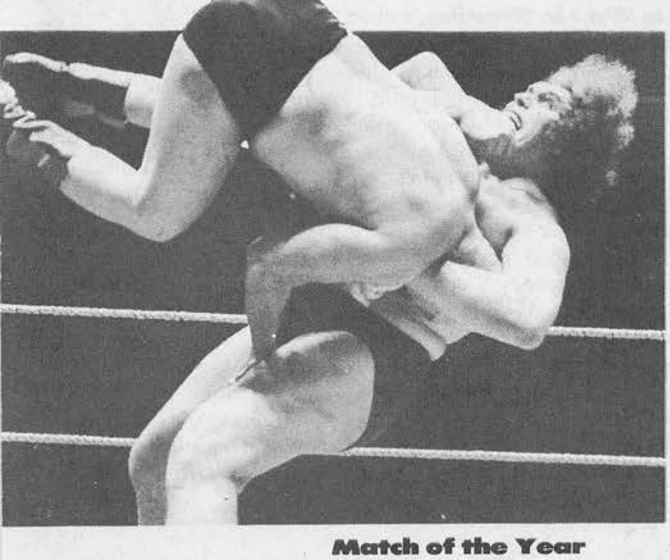
1974: Referee Johnny "Red Shoes" Dugan is bandaged after having fire thrown at him by The Sheik.

1979: WWF champion Bob Backlund has words with AWA champion Nick Bockwinkel before their unification match (above). 1980: Backlund and NWA champ Harley Race fight to a bloody draw (right).

1981

Wrestler of the Year
Ric Flair

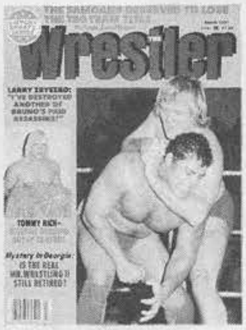
Tag Team of the Year
The Fabulous Freebirds



Match of the Year
Andre the Giant vs. Killer Khan

Stories of the year

***The Wrestler* Reunites The Jaggers Family** (January) Lewis Jeaudion had completely lost contact with his son, who was wrestling under the name Bobby Jaggers. Knowing only his son's profession and unable to reach him, Lewis wrote to Bill Apter, managing editor of *The Wrestler*. Apter did some legwork, sent Lewis a phone number, and the groundwork for a touching reunion had been laid.



Race vs. Patera: The Three-Sided Title Controversy (February) In one of the most disputed decisons in NWA history, referee Lou Thesz was accused of interfering on Harley Race's behalf as the champion retained his title with a best-of-three falls victory over Ken Patera. Both wrestlers charged the other with cheating while Patera also complained that Thesz prevented him from pinning Race.

Tommy Rich—Wildfire Burning Out Of Control (March) Tommy Rich turned from good guy to rulebreaker and proceeded to go absolutely berserk. His outbursts of sheer, unwarranted violence saddened the fans who once held him dear.

The Samoans Deserved To Lose The WWF Tag Team Title (March) Capt. Lou Albano—who wrote this article—led Afa and Sika from nothingness to the WWF tag team title. Then, for some reason, The Samoans stopped obeying Albano's commands. They didn't listen to the Captain, and that's why Lou says they deserved to be beaten by Tony Garea and Rick Martel.

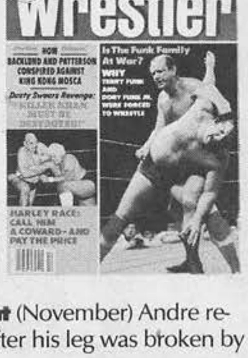
Pedro Morales Wins The Intercontinental Title! (April) The Northeast's most violent feud reached a climax when ex-WWF champion Pedro Morales beat Ken Patera at Madison Square Garden to capture the I-C belt. Patera blemished the fine match when he attacked referee Pat Patterson after being pinned.

Bruno Sammartino: "I Want To Break Stan Hansen's Neck!" (June) Bruno wanted to avenge the night Hansen sadistically broke Sammartino's neck with a foreign object and his dangerous "lariat" maneuver five years earlier. Sammartino's anger had lain dormant until Hansen re-entered the WWF and began causing havoc, showing no respect for Bruno—or anyone else.

Bounty $40,000: Target—Jerry Lawler (September) The vicious Jimmy Hart put up 40 grand for anyone who could end Jerry Lawler's career. Austin Idol and Jimmy Valiant, both of whom disliked Lawler immensely, were the ones who tried to cash in on Hart's offer. Valiant did beat Lawler, but not badly enough.

Is The Funk Family At War? Why Terry Funk And Dory Funk Jr. Were Forced To Wrestle (October) For their whole careers, the close-knit brothers had turned down lucrative offers to wrestle against one another. But at the International Wrestling Grand Prix Tournament in Japan, a random drawing of straws created the match that some fans had waited a lifetime to see: Funk vs. Funk. Terry and Dory Jr. wrestled spectacularly and virtually evenly for one full hour, at which time Dory Jr. was awarded a narrow decision.

Dusty Rhodes Regains The NWA Title! (October) The "American Dream" won the World title for the second time in 10 months when he beat Harley Race in 16:55. Rhodes absorbed much punishment before taking control with a series of bionic elbowsmashes.



Verne Gagne's Last Match: Can The AWA Survive Without Him? (October) Gagne, who held the AWA title for the better part of 25 years, added to his legacy by pinning longtime nemesis Nick Bockwinkel to defend the belt in his last match. The bout took place on Gagne's 55th birthday.

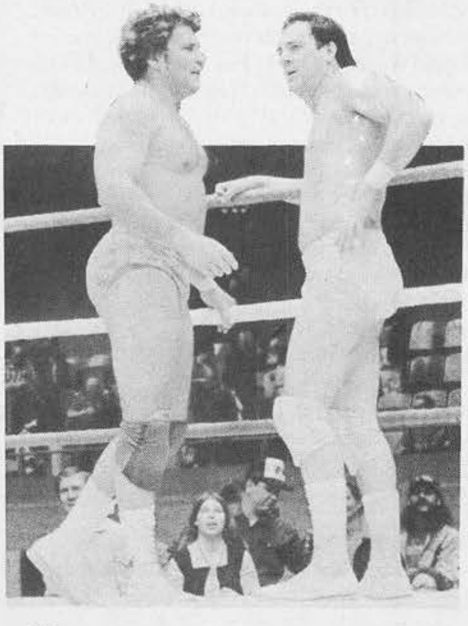
Comeback! The Return Of Andre The Giant (November) Andre returned with a vengeance just a few months after his leg was broken by Killer Khan.

Wrestler of the Year
Bob Backlund

1982

Match of the Year
Bob Backlund vs. Jimmy Snuka

Tag Team of the Year
Jim Brunzell & Greg Gagne



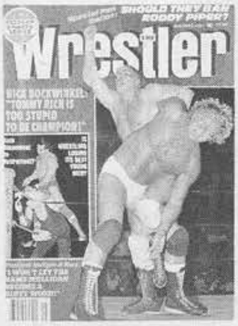
Stories of the year

Classic Encounter—Mascaras vs. Steamboat! How A Dream Match Became A Reality (January) The match that could never happen—two brilliant scientific wrestlers in the same ring—took place in Tokyo. After a superb 71-minute battle, Steamboat and Mascaras called a cease-fire. They simply stopped wrestling and shook hands in the middle of the ring. And nobody was disappointed.

Bruno Says Goodbye To Wrestling: Exclusive Coverage Of His Last—And Greatest—Match (February) After 22 years, "The Living Legend" was saying goodbye (though, as it turned out, not for the last time). Before he left, however, he settled some unfinished business with long-time rival George "The Animal" Steele.

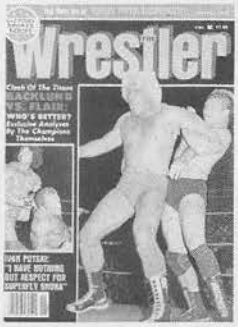
The Strange Reappearance Of Superstar Graham (May) When Graham disappeared from the wrestling scene for nearly two years, it was feared that he was dead. His obituary was actually printed in a Pennsylvania newspaper. But Graham was alive and well—and planning an assault on WWF champion Bob Backlund.

Rick Steamboat vs. Ric Flair: How The NWA Belt Strangled Wrestling's Greatest Friendship (June) Steamboat had called NWA champ Flair a friend and shook his hand on TV the night before the match. But their title match was anything but friendly. Long after the final bell had rung, Flair continued his assault on Steamboat. The former friends became bitter enemies.



Why Putski And Adonis Didn't Want You To See This Match (August) Warned by the WWF that excessive violence could lead to suspensions, Adrian Adonis and Ivan Putski tried to bar all press and photographers from their match. *Wrestler* photographer Bill Apter snuck in, and by the time he was discovered in the balcony, it was too late.

Jerry Lawler Drives Home His Point: Wrestling Is No Place For Jokers (August) Lawler, upset over the antics of comedian/entertainer Andy Kaufman, challenged him to a match. A series of piledrivers sent Kaufman to the hospital with head and neck injuries.



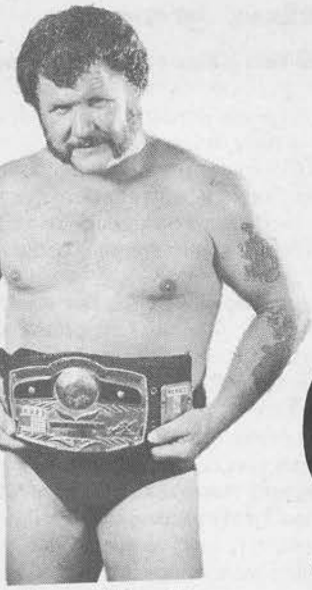
Nick Bockwinkel vs. Hulk Hogan: Bedlam By The Bay (September) Hogan lost control of himself and a chance for pre-WWF glory when he was disqualified for beating the AWA World champion over the head with a chair.

Terror In Mid-Air: Wrestling's First Scaffold Match (November) Setting a new precedent for wrestling brutality, Bill Dundee and Koko Ware took their feud 14½ feet above the ring to a two-foot wide scaffold. Ware not only lost the match, but he suffered a broken wrist upon falling.

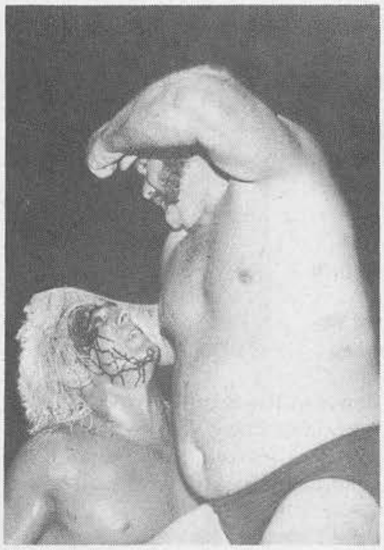
Clash Of The Titans: Backlund vs. Flair—Who's Better? (November) Nobody knew for sure before the match, and nobody knew for sure after. Following months of intense negotiations, WWF titlist Bob Backlund finally met NWA champ Ric Flair at the Omni in Atlanta. The match, however, ended in a double-countout, and the world titles remained split.

Your Votes Are In: Roddy Piper Suspended (November) After a months-long poll, 60 percent of *The Wrestler's* readers voted that Piper should be suspended from broacasting on *Georgia Championship Wrestling* because of his slanted opinions. Threatened with a lawsuit, GCW decided to limit Piper to just two minutes of air time on each week's program.

1983



Wrestler of the Year
Harley Race



Match of the Year
Harley Race vs. Ric Flair

Tag Team of the Year
The Road Warriors

Stories of the year

"Bonebuster" Must Be Stopped Before Barry Windham Is Crippled! (January) An anonymous entity, known only as the "Bonebuster," placed a $1,100 *per bone* bounty on Barry Windham. Windham's friend, Mike Graham, offered $1,100 for the Bonebuster's identity. Though the true identity of the Bonesbuster was never proved, the main suspect was Kevin Sullivan.

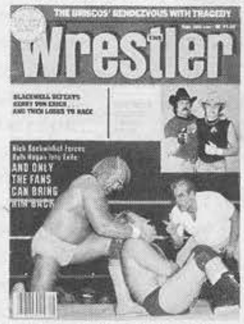
Exclusive Coverage: Nick Bockwinkel Regains The AWA Title From Otto Wanz (February) Six weeks after losing the AWA World title to Austrian great Otto Wanz, Nick Bockwinkel, with a bit of assistance from his loud-mouthed manager, Bobby Heenan, regained his prized belt.

Backlund Sneak-Attacks Superstar Graham: The WWF Belt Is Tainted By Bloodlust (February) The bitter feelings between these men having not subsided in the 4½ years since their historic title match, Graham mutilated the WWF belt and Backlund responded by blindsiding the former champ. Backlund received heavy criticism for his actions.

The Tommy Rich-Buzz Sawyer Feud: Put These Men In A Cage! (February) This is the feud by which all others would be measured. Rich and Sawyer were literally destroying each other's careers with their long and brutal war. And now the editors of *The Wrestler* were demanding that it be brought to a cage, where finally a decisive winner would be declared.

Showdown In Charlotte: Roddy Piper's Title Match With Ric Flair Ends In Chaos (March) Piper and Flair's match had all the earmarks of a classic, but for some inexplicable reason, Greg Valenine and Wahoo McDaniel, scheduled to wrestle each other later on the card, jumped into the ring and turned the bout into a free-for-all. The match was ruled a no-contest.

The Sensational Tiger Mask: Wrestling At The Speed Of Light! (April) The popular Japanese comic strip, Tiger Mask, came alive in the form of the fastest Japanese import since the 280-ZX. Just as quickly as he won the NWA and WWF junior heavyweight titles, Tiger Mask, unfortunately, returned to his homeland.



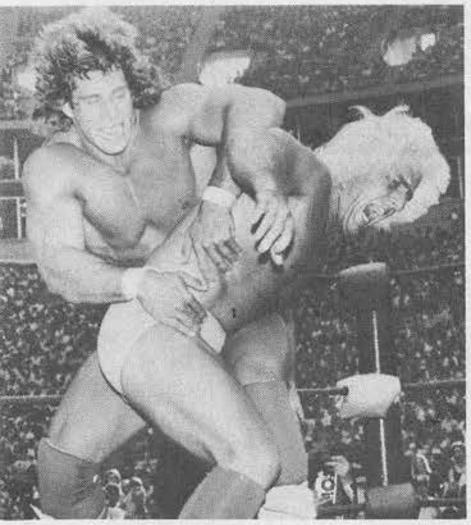
16,000 Fans Turned Away! Mid-Atlantic Wrestling Spectacular Makes History (July) Some 16,000 fans jammed the Greensboro Coliseum and another 16,000 were turned away as NWA champ Ric Flair battled his close friend, Greg Valentine, to a one-hour draw. Rick Steamboat and Jay Youngblood won the NWA tag team title from Sgt. Slaughter and Don Kernodle.

Nick Bockwinkel Forces Hulk Hogan Into Exile: And Only The Fans Can Bring Him Back (September) Frustrated by another questionable loss to AWA champion Nick Bockwinkel, Hogan left the AWA completely and headed for for Japan. *The Wrestler* urged Hogan's fans to sign petitions that assured Hogan they weren't disappppointed in him and that he should return and try again.

Blackjack Mulligan & Barry Windham: Has Their Reunion Turned Sour? (September) Not really. Father (Mulligan) and son (Windham) split again. This time, insisted Mulligan, it was for Windham's own good. Mulligan's enemies had targeted Windham. "There are too many guys who want to punish me through you," said Mulligan to his son during their farewell dinner.

Record-Shattering Seventh Title Reign: Harley Race Defeats Ric Flair For The NWA World Title (October) Race made wrestling history when he captured his seventh NWA World championship. The legendary Lou Thesz wore the NWA belt six times. Ironically, Race won the belt from Ric Flair, who would later match his record of seven title reigns.

Match of the Year
Kerry Von Erich vs. Ric Flair



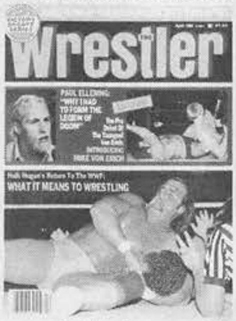
1984

Stories of the year

Roddy Piper Is Risking His Life: This Killer Feud With Greg Valentine Must Be Stopped! (January) Piper lost the U.S. heavyweight title—and 75 percent of the hearing in his left ear—in a bloody match with Valentine, a typical chapter in their violent feud.

The Grand Wizard: 1929-1983 (February) The wrestling world was stunned when The Grand Wizard died of a heart attack at the age of 54 on October 12. Hated by fans, the Wizard brought color and excitement to the sport, and even his most bitter enemies could not deny his brilliance.

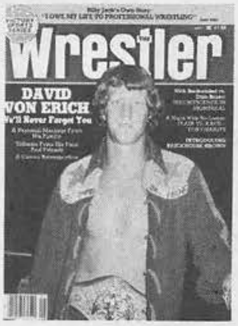
Crisis In The Mid-South; Hacksaw Duggan Sends For Andre The Giant (February) Duggan watched, frustrated, as wrestlers fell to Gen. Skandor Akbar and his assassins. Knowing something had to be done, Duggan challenged Kamala and Missing Link to a tag team match—and brought Andre the Giant in as his partner. The strategy, of course, worked.



Hulk Hogan's Return To The WWF: What It Means To Wrestling (April) With The Iron Sheik in control of the WWF World title, rumors were rampant that Hogan was planing to leave the AWA and return to the WWF. We all know what happened next!

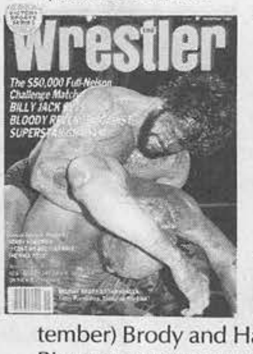
Paul Ellering: "Why I Had To Form The Legion Of Doom" (April) "Precious" Paul sent shockwaves through the sport when he formed The Legion of Doom, "invincible and unparalleled in the world of sports." Ellering's Legion included Jake "The Snake" Roberts, The Sheik, and, of course, The Road Warriors.

David Von Erich: We'll Never Forget You (June) Only 25 years old, David Von Erich died of acute enteritis while on a three-week tour of Japan. The popular Texan was mourned by family, fans, and the entire wrestling community. The holder of many regional singles and tag team titles, Von Erich was widely acknowledged as a future NWA World champion.



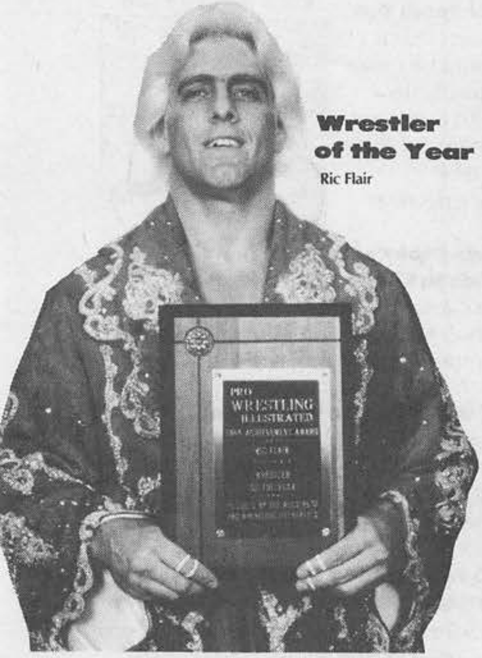
Upset Of The Year! How Bundy And Superstar Stopped The Road Warriors . . . For One Night! (September) King Kong Bundy and Masked Superstar defeated The Road Warriors for the Georgia National tag team title. A day later, however, Superstar was ambushed (most likely by Road Warriors' manager Paul Ellering) and rendered unable to defend the championship. Two weeks later, the Warriors regained the title in a tournament.

Kerry Von Erich Wins The NWA World Title: For David . . . For Texas . . . For Wrestling! (September) More than 43,000 fans were on hand at Texas Stadium to witness Kerry Von Erich win the NWA World title from Ric Flair. Von Erich entered the ring wearing a jacket with the words, "In Memory of David, 1958-1984" emblazoned on the back. "It was like David was right there in the ring with me," Kerry said afterward.



The $50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham (November) Superstar Graham broke Billy Jack's hand after losing to him in an arm-wrestling contest. Four days later, Graham defeated Jack for the Florida title. But Jack got his revenge just 20 days later: He caught Graham in a full-nelson to win a $50,000 challenge match.

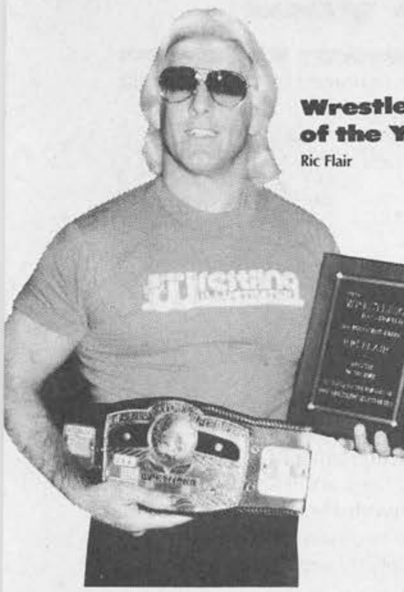
Bruiser Brody & Stan Hansen: Today Puerto Rico, Tomorrow The AWA? (September) Brody and Hansen wer so violent and destructive, Puerto Rican promoters were hesitant o use them. The pair contemplated a move to the AWA, but a full-time campaign there never materialized.



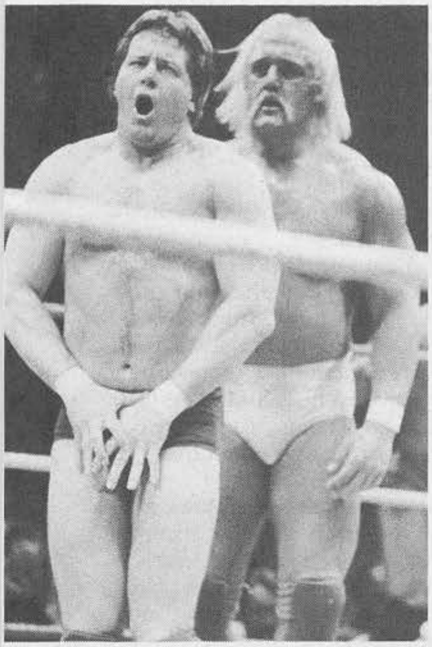
Wrestler of the Year
Ric Flair

Tag Team of the Year
The Road Warriors

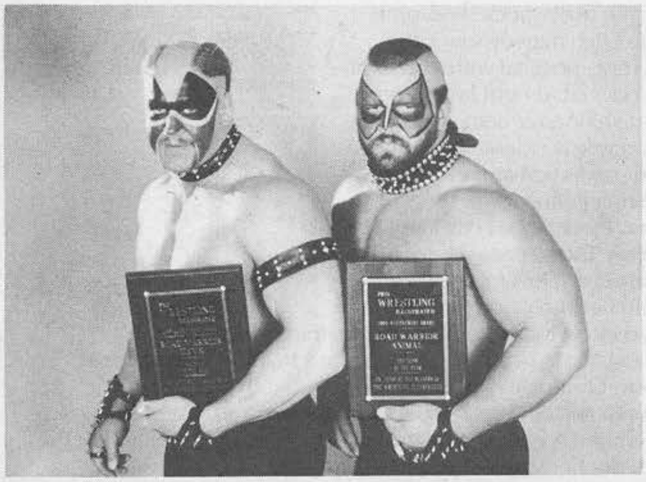
1985



Wrestler of the Year
Ric Flair



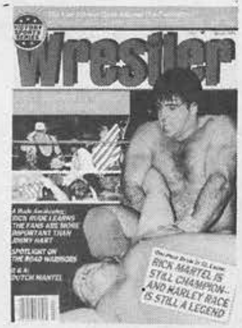
Match of the Year
Hulk Hogan & Mr. T vs. Roddy Piper & Paul Orndorff



Tag Team of the Year
The Road Warriors

Stories of the year

Exclusive! Lou Albano's Apology To Cyndi Lauper (January) The war of words between legendary manager Albano and rock star Lauper reached its peak when Lauper-advised Wendi Richter defeated Albano-managed Fabulous Moolah to win the WWF World women's title, ending Moolah's 29-year title reign. Albano took the defeat like a true sportsman and apologized to Lauper for his insults.



One-Hour Draw In St. Louis: Rick Martel Is Still Champion—And Harley Race Is Still A Legend (March) Race, a seven-time NWA World champion, took a shot at Martel's AWA World title. Race held the advantage for most of the classic contest—which ended in a one-hour draw that saw fans hailing Martel's skills for perseverance against excellence.

Will Gary Hart Accept Our Offer? $100,000 To End The Chris Adams-Kevin Von Erich War! (April) When popular Chris Adams defected to Gary Hart's stable and began a war with his former friend, *The Wrestler* felt compelled to step in and try to end the war. Hart refused. His thirst for blood was clearly more powerful than his greed.

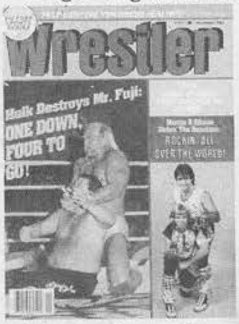
Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez vs. The Road Warriors: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Super Bowl! (May) The match between NWA tag team champions Rhodes and Fernandez and AWA champs Hawk and Animal concluded with a wild four-way brawl. The Warriors were counted out, giving Rhodes and Fernandez the victory and leaving each team with its respective titles.

10 Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! (August) The Warriors' much-publicized first Japanese tour was a huge success, as evidenced by one bout in which the pair defeated Animal Hamaguchi and Killer Khan in just 3:39. Animal wowed the crowd when he lifted the 300-pound Khan over his head and threw him across the ring!

Wrestling's Hottest Feud Uncovered: The Lawler-Savage War Is Raging Out Of Control! (September) Prior to his entry into the WWF, Savage feuded extensively with Memphis legend Jerry Lawler. Their battles were marked by fireballs and freely flowing blood, indications of the high level of intense hatred that existed between the two men.

How The Fans Saved George "The Animal" Steele (October) On one unusual night, the hated "Animal" competed in a six-man bout and was left behind by his teammates, Nikolai Volkoff and The Iron Sheik. The sympathetic audience cheered Steele as he limped from the ring. The cheers changed Steele's demented attitude, and he became a fan favorite for the final months of his career.

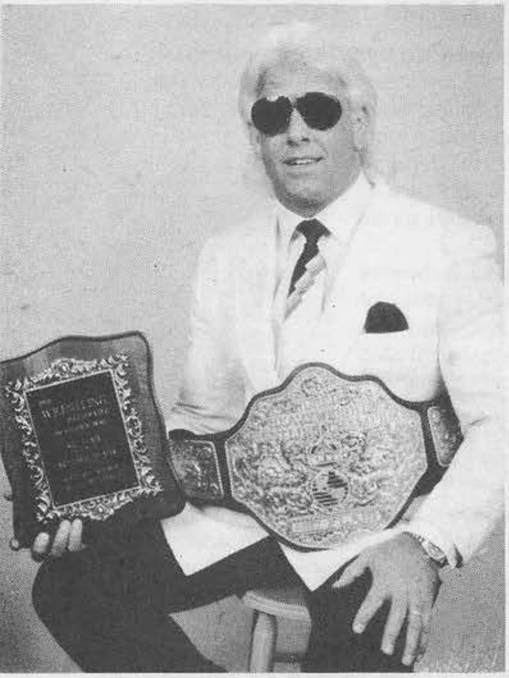
Morton & Gibson Defeat The Russians: Rockin' All Over The World! (November) Rick Morton and Robert Gibson, fresh off losing their Mid-South tag team championship, were overmatched and outweighed against Ivan Koloff and Krusher Khrushchev. But determination led the Rock 'n' Rolls to a resounding victory and gave them the first of their four NWA World tag team titles.



Reunion! The Return Of The Garvin Brothers! (November) After two years of not speaking to each other, Ronnie Garvin burst back into his brother Jim's life. Ron and Jim placed their mutual differences aside to battle Dino Bravo and Gino Brito Jr. in Canada—and were successful in their efforts.

Exclusive Photos! How Muraco & Fuji Blinded Rick Steamboat! (December) The most revealing picture showed Mr. Fuji throwing a handful of powder into Steamboat's face. Rick's eyes were bandaged overnight following the incident, and some close to "The Dragon" say that Steamboat's sight has never been the same since.

1986



Wrestler of the Year
Ric Flair

Match of the Year
Dusty Rhodes vs. Ric Flair

Tag Team of the Year
The Rock 'n' Roll Express

Stories of the year

Southern Champion Lex Luger: "I'll Run Barry Windham Back To The WWF!" (April) As a brash rookie managed by Hiro Matsuda, Luger was quick to demean his opponents while bragging of his own indestructibility. Luger's primary target was Barry Windham, son of Blackjack Mulligan. Lex was angry because he felt Barry rode his father's coattails to stardom.

For The Love Of Elizabeth . . . Randy Savage Must Beat Hulk Hogan! (April) For all her devotion to Savage, Elizabeth truly loved the WWF World title belt, which at the time was wrapped around Hogan's waist. Savage was never able to guarantee Elizabeth's loyalty by beating Hogan, but he later captured the belt with a victory over Ted DiBiase in a tournament final at Wrestlemania IV.

Introducing The Blade Runners (May) Rock and Flash were setting the wrestling world on fire with their powerful bodies, computer training methods, and painted eyes. The two have risen to even greater heights since: Flash is known as Sting, and Rock goes by the name The Ultimate Warrior.

From Leather To Lace: Adrian Adonis' Startling Transformation (September) Once known as one of the toughest wrestlers in the sport, Adonis changed his ways and wrapped himself in lace as he hosted "The Flower Shop" on WWF broadcasts.

Bruiser Brody vs. Rick Rude: The World Class Title Becomes A World-Class Title (September) The newly formed World Class federation, having broken away from the NWA, strutted its stuff at the David Von Erich Memorial Parade Of Champions in Texas. The day was marked by a memorable main event: World Class champion Rick Rude narrowly avoided three pins at the hands of Bruiser Brody and eventually pinned Brody to retain the belt.

Bruno Thrives In Hulk's Garden: Will Sammartino Become The WWF's Number-One Man Again? (October) With the WWF struggling to maintain solid attendance at its major shows, Bruno returned from semiretirement to team with Tito Santana in a Madison Square Garden bout against Randy Savage and Adrian Adonis. The match was clearly the card's most attractive event as 20,000 fans filed into the Garden. Happy ticket scalpers were among those who wondered whether Sammartino had even more drawing power than Hulk Hogan.

Summer Bloody Summer: The Red-Hot War Between Nikita Koloff And Magnum T.A. (October) Amidst the sweltering summer heat in North Carolina, Magnum T.A. trained intensely for his best-of-seven U.S. title series against Koloff. The series (which Koloff ultimately won) stretched both wrestlers' endurance to the limit and was marked by steel chains and flowing blood.

Tragedy Strikes The Von Erichs—Again: Is Kerry Von Erich's Career Over? (October) Two members of the Von Erich family—Jack and David—had met untimely deaths, and a third—Mike—battled to overcome toxic shock syndrome. This latest Von Erich tragedy saw Kerry wind up in a Texas hospital with a dislocated right hip, a lacerated right knee, and a fractured right ankle after being thrown 50 feet in a motorcycle accident. Kerry underwent a 15-hour operation and eventually returned to the ring in fine form.

Hulk Hogan vs. Paul Orndorff: The Misunderstanding That Turned Into a Bloody Vendetta! (November) The uneasy friendship between Hogan and Orndorff dissolved into a raging feud over something as seemingly harmless as Hogan not declining to interrupt a training session for a phone call from Orndorff.

Ric Flair's Fourth NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Quiet The Critics! (December) A new title reign always brings opportunities to prove oneself. But because of his underhanded tactics, Flair will always have something to prove.

Wrestler of the Year
Hulk Hogan

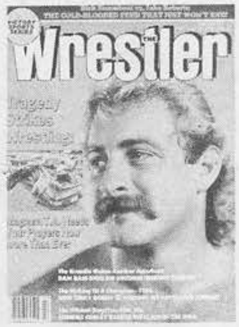
Match of the Year
Rick Steamboat vs. Randy Savage

Tag Team of the Year
The Midnight Express & Manager Jim Cornette

1987

Stories of the year

Ted DiBiase's Paralyzing Fear: "I Know I Will Die In The Ring!" (January) In an exclusive feature, DiBiase revealed this innermost fear for the first time, and how he must bring that fear under control before each match. The reason? His father, "Iron" Mike DiBiase died after suffering injuries in the ring.



Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever (February) Magnum's life was jeopardized by a terrible auto accident that caused a cervical vertabra in his back to explode. The beloved wrestler received nearly 2,500 phone calls and hundreds of flower arrangements the day after the accident. Magnum, who was traveling 55 miles an hour on a wet road when his Porsche skidded into a utility pole, never wrestled again and still walks with a slight limp.

Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! (March) Moved by Magnum T.A.'s stoic courage in the face of personal tragedy, Koloff befriended Magnum's good friend, Dusty Rhodes, and parted from his Russian heritage. His uncle, Ivan Koloff, and his fellow countryman, Krusher Khrushchev, were determined to punish Nikita.

Wrestling Like It Oughta Be: The Flair-Windham War Is A Classic! (June) The feud between NWA World champion Ric Flair and top challenger Barry Windham reached epic proportions as the two great athletes repeatedly battled to 60-minute draws. They then began scheduling *90-minute* bouts to try to settle the classic war!

Lex Luger Joins The Horsemen: Is He Branded For Life? (July) Luger turned his back on fans and fan favorites to join forces with wrestling's most despicable men. And while Luger willingly brought the stigma of being a Horseman upon himself, he has since redeemed himself admirably.

Ole Anderson: "Kicking Arn's Butt Makes Me A Happy Man!" (August) After The Four Horsemen forced Ole out to make room for Lex Luger, Arn Anderson began bad-mouthing his flesh and blood left and right. Ole got a measure of revenge, however, by dominating Arn in a series of bouts.

It's Do Or Die Time! Sting Dumps Eddie Gilbert (October) Throughout his rookie year in the UWF, Sting was managed and manipulated by the nefarious Eddie Gilbert. Sting wasn't named the 1986 Rookie of the Year because of his management, however. By breaking his contract with Gilbert, the talented wrestler gave himself a chance to reach new heights on his own.

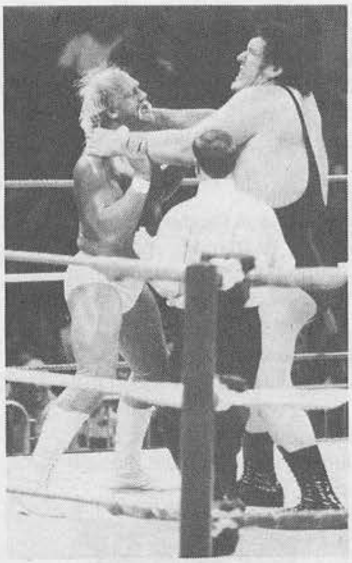
Lex Luger Wins The U.S. Title From Nikita Koloff! (November) A member of The Four Horsemen, Luger defeated Koloff, aided by the interference of his manager, J.J. Dillon. Koloff had pinned Luger for 15 seconds, but referee Earl Hebner lay unconscious. Luger then smashed Koloff with a chair and won the match with a backbreaker. This bout sparked the Koloff-Luger feud that still rages today.

Steve Williams Dethrones Bubba Rogers For The UWF Belt! (November) On the same night that Lex Luger won the U.S. title from Nikita Koloff, Williams overcame the pain of a broken left arm and defeated Rogers (now known in the WWF as Big Bossman) for the UWF title. The victory was a vindication of sorts for "Dr. Death." Many critics felt Williams was unable to win a major title. With this match, Williams proved his critics wrong.

They Battled In "King" Lawler's Court . . . But Curt Hennig Still Wears The AWA Crown! (December) Lawler was unable to utilize his home ring advantage when he challenged Hennig in Memphis. With the fans railing against him, Hennig used interference by Brickhouse Brown to get the decision and retain his title.

1988

Tag Team of the Year
The Road Warriors



Match of the Year
Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan

Wrestler of the Year
Randy Savage

Stories of the year

Victim Of Circumstance: Why Curt Hennig Will Never Get The Respect He Deserves (January) While his opponents respected Hennig's technical ability, "Mr. Perfect" was unable to strike fear in other wrestlers' hearts. Although Curt held the AWA title, he was viewed as a fine college wrestler who hadn't fully developed his professional skills. Now Hennig has proven himself as a pro—and he has the Inetrcontinental title to show for it.

Kerry Von Erich's Comeback: Miracle Or Mistake? (February) Two years after a horrible motorcycle accident, Von Erich was planning a match against archrival Brian Adias. Von Erich still walked with a heavy limp, and questions about his injured right ankle surrounded the comeback attempt.

Lex Luger: "I'm Free Of The Horsemen . . . But The Horsemen Aren't Free Of Me!" (April) Luger ended his relationship with The Four Horsemen when he threw J.J. Dillon over the ropes at the first Bunkhouse Stampede. Suddenly, Lex was all alone, and he vowed to take on the rest of the Horsemen by himself.

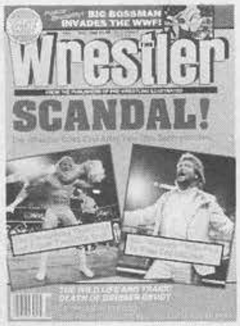
Money For Nothing: Ted DiBiase Pays A High Price For His Greed! (June) DiBiase's attempt to buy the WWF World belt from Andre the Giant was for naught as WWF President Jack Tunney declared the title vacant. Coupling the money he gave Andre with the sum he paid pseudo-referee Earl Hebner, DiBiase lost more than a million dollars!

Wrestling's Most Dangerous Match Ever: The Triple Dome Of Terror! (September) Three cages were stacked one on top of the other at the World Class' Parade of Champions. A total of 17 wrestlers entered the bottom cage and grappled viciously to reach the top, where three bloodied competitors were declared the winners.

Four Horsemen Triple-Crown Champions! Barry Windham Wins U.S. Title Tourney (September) Windham, the newest addition to the Horsemen, solidified the group's dominance of the NWA. Ric Flair had the World belt and Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard were the World tag team champs when Windham beat Nikita Koloff in a tournament final to grab the vacant U.S. title.

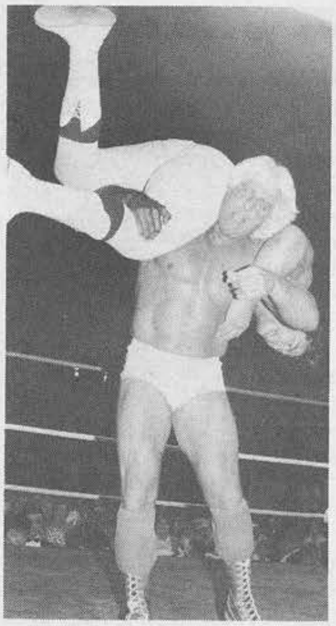
More Venom Than Ever: Love's Bite Makes Jake "The Snake" A Man Again! (October) Jake Roberts was languishing uneventfully in the WWF when Rick Rude made a move on "The Snake's" gorgeous wife, Cheryl. Driven by the desire to protect his loved one, Jake fought with newfound intensity as his feud with Rude unfolded.

Scandal! The Conspiracy That Cost Lex Luger The NWA Belt! (November) Luger was on his way to a victory over champion Ric Flair when a Maryland state rule requiring the match to be stopped at the first sign of bloodshed was invoked by a ringside commissioner. An investigation by *The Wrestler* revealed that the rule might not exist! Bribery by the Horsemen was a likely explanation.



The Wild Life And Tragic Death Of Bruiser Brody (November) Tagged the "Mercenary of Mayhem" for his wild actions in the ring, Brody was a family man named Frank Goodish on his own time. At age 42, with a wife and a young son, he was stabbed to death in the locker room at Juan Ramon Lobriel Stadium in Puerto Rico. Jose Huertas Gonzales, the only suspect, was later acquitted.

Exclusive Coverage: Megabucks vs. Megapowers (December) Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage overcame the Megabucks team of Ted DiBiase and Andre the Giant at SummerSlam '88. The turning point came when Elizabeth, the Megapowers' beautiful valet, stood on a turnbuckle and dropped her skirt to reveal a skimpy bikini that distracted the Megabucks and led to their loss.

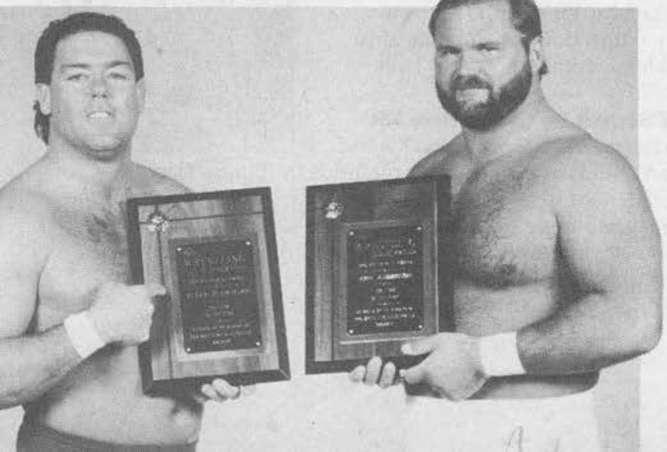


Match of the Year
Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat

1989

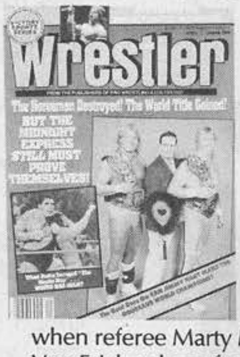
Wrestler of the Year
Ric Flair

Tag Team of the Year
Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson



Stories of the year

The Horsemen Destroyed! The Belts Are Theirs! But The Midnight Express *Still* Must Prove Themselves! (January) Bobby Eaton and Stan Lane succeeded in defeating Four Horsemen Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard for the WCW World tag team title. (Tully and Arn quickly departed the WCW for the WWF after their title loss.) Despite the success, however, the Express still needed to fend off a host of challengers to affirm their excellence as a team.



SuperClash Supercontroversy: Were They Right To Stop The Lawler-Von Erich Bout? (April) World Class champion Kerry Von Erich had clamped a brutal clawhold on AWA World champ Jerry Lawler when referee Marty Miller stopped the match with 18:53 gone by. Von Erich, whose face and upper body were covered in blood, thought he had won. Actually, Miller ruled that Von Erich could not continue due to excessive bleeding; he awarded the match to Lawler.

Randy Savage And Hulk Hogan—Ready To Rumble! (May) Hogan clotheslined Savage—his Megapowers tag team partner—to eliminate "Macho Man" from the Royal Rumble. Despite Elizabeth's attempts at peaceful intervention, Hogan and Savage were well on the way to a heated parting.

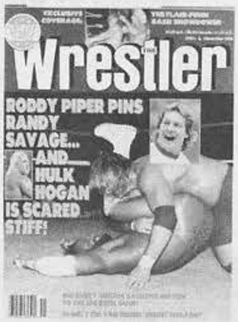
Lex Luger Wins The U.S. Title—Sting's Exclusive Report To *The Wrestler* (June) Sting filed a firsthand report after watching his good friend and tag team partner defeat Barry Windham for the U.S. title. Sting marveled at Lex' ability to absorb intense punishment and come back to win the match in 10:44.

Kerry Von Erich's Message To Eric Embry: "Don't Ever Betray Your Fans!" (August) Von Erich was pleased to see rulebreaker-turned-fan favorite Embry win the World Class Texas belt. But Von Erich, who had endured his share of vicious battles with Embry, was worried that Embry might revert to his cheating ways. By late-1989, Von Erich's fears were realized—and Embry is still breaking the rules today in the USWA.

Dethroned & Demoralized: Can Randy Savage Recover From WrestleMania V? (August) Hulk Hogan survived Savage's finisher—the flying elbowdrop—at the WWF's supercard and went on to blast the "Macho Man" with a legdrop and move in for the pin that ended Randy's title reign. Savage was devastated by the defeat. Some say that Savage has yet to recover from the stunning loss.

Tag Team Record Demolished! Ax And Smash Make History—Quietly (September) Demolition's WWF World tag team title reign reached one year and six days—long enough to eclipse Jimmy and Johnny Valiant's record, which had stood since 1975. But because of the WWF's general refusal to acknowledge past history, Demolition's achievement received little fanfare.

Garvin & Hayes' Diabolical Plot To Dump Terry Gordy! (November) Gordy helped Jim Garvin and Michael Hayes win the WCW World tag team title, but then Garvin and Hayes wanted to oust Gordy from The Fabulous Freebirds. The plot might have succeeded, had a fed-up Gordy not returned to Japan of his own volition.



Exclusive Coverage: The Flair-Funk Bash Showdown! (November) Six-time WCW World champion Flair shrugged off back and neck injuries to beat Funk in 16:25 and retain his title. After the match, Flair said that it "may have been the most important win of my life."

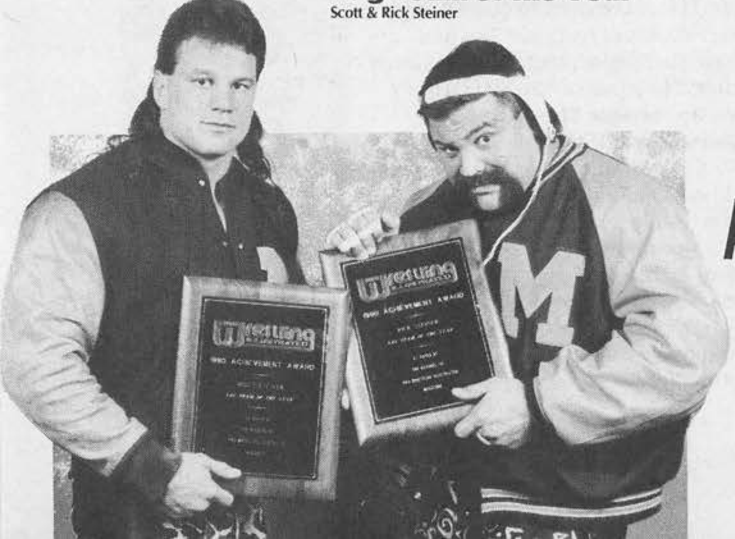
The Agony & The Ecstasy: Andre & The Ultimate Warrior At The Crossroads (December) A pair of fantastic careers were clearly headed in opposite directions as Warrior routinely and repeatedly dispensed of Andre the Giant in less than a minute at arenas across the nation.

1990

Wrestler of the Year
Sting

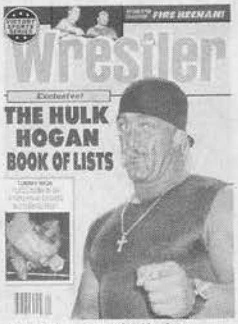
Match of the Year
The Ultimate Warrior vs. Hulk Hogan

Tag Team of the Year
Scott & Rick Steiner



Stories of the year

Challenge To Tully & Arn: If You Think You're Great—Fire Heenan And Prove It! (January) Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson were the only team in history to hold both the WWF and WCW World tag team titles. But the controversial circumstances by which they attained those honors would forever taint their significance in the eyes of history. Until they rid themselves of their interfering manager, Bobby Heenan, the world would never know how much praise to heap on this talented duo.



Hulk's Title In Trouble? Bad News For The WWF Belt! (February) Hulk Hogan was able to stave off the challenge of Bad News Brown, but not without paying a significant price. "Out of all the men I've wrestled," said Owen Hart, "Bad News was the most sadistic by far." Hogan would lose his title just five months after his feud with Brown ended.

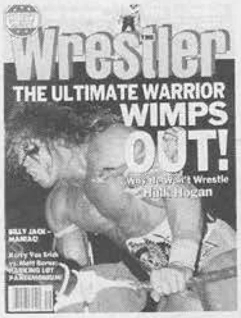
"I Quit!" One War Ends, Two More Begin (March) Battered and exhausted, Terry Funk uttered the two words—"I Quit"—that surrendered his ugly feud with WCW champion Ric Flair. Seeing their ally suffer such humiliation was too much for Lex Luger and The Great Muta to bear. They attacked Flair, who was fortunate to be saved by Sting.

As The Losses Mount . . . Is Woman Doomed? (April) Woman's master plan for WCW domination had one major snag. Her tag team, Doom, couldn't win a big match. It probably said more about Woman than it did about Butch Reed, Ron Simmons, or Teddy Long when, after leaving Woman and signing with Long, Doom became *the* dominant tag team in the federation.

Sting & Ultimate Warrior: Running A Parallel Course To Greatness (May) Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan may have reigned as the respective world champions of the WCW and WWF, but Sting and Ultimate Warrior, two wrestlers who were trained together and who teamed together early in their careers, were gaining ground quickly. Both Sting and Ultimate Warrior would win their titles within three months of each other, and then, ironically, lose them within eight days of each other.

Koloffs Collide! Ivan vs. Nikita: The Coldest War Of All (June) The intellectuals labeled this war a microcosm of the changing political scene in the Soviet Union. And they were probably right. But watching uncle and nephew (whose relationship five years earlier was more like father and son) pummel each other was just plain sad. "Nikita is no longer a Koloff," Ivan said.

The Ultimate Warrior Wimps Out: Why He Won't Wrestle Hulk Hogan (September) WWF President Jack Tunney tried to convince the public that, after the violent outcome of WrestleMania VI in which The Ultimate Warrior took Hulk Hogan's WWF title, a rematch would be too dangerous. We weren't buying it. After an extensive investigation, *The Wrestler* discovered a clause in The Ultimate Warrior's contract that allowed him to turn down matches against three wrestlers. Among them was Hulk Hogan.



A Special Report By Sting: How Ric Flair Can Regain His Greatness (October) Ric Flair could always justify his methods by hitting his critics with one cold, hard fact: He was *the* man. Once he was no longer *the* man, his image suffered tremendously. Some said he should retire. Sting, the new man, saw Flair for the great champion that he always was and prophetically warned that he could one say find it within himself to once again rise to the sport's highest level of respect.

Tag Team of the Year
Scott & Rick Steiner?

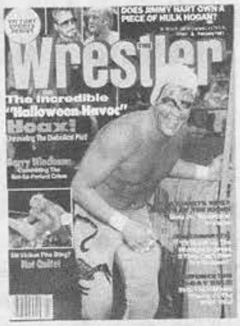
Match of the Year
Rick & Scott Steiner vs. Lex Luger & Sting?

Wrestler of the Year
Hulk Hogan?

1991

Stories of the year

Muta vs. Steamboat In Japan: East Meets West—North Of The Ring! (February) Two martial arts experts—The Great Muta and Rick Steamboat—faced off in a thrilling battle during Antonio Inoki's 30th anniversary celebration in Yokohama, Japan. Both wrestlers put on a stellar display of aerial skills. Ultimately, Muta sprayed Steamboat's face with his green mist, setting the weakened Ricky up for his spectacular moonsault press and a subsequent pin.

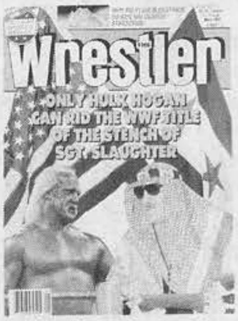


The Incredible Halloween Havoc Hoax! (February) The Four Horsemen nearly pulled off one of the greatest hoaxes in wrestling history. With Sting tied up in the dressing room, Barry Windham made himself up to look like the WCW World champion and allowed himself to be pinned by Sid Vicious. Believing the title to have changed hands for the worse, the crowd watched in stunned silence as fireworks exploded and balloons dropped from above. But Sting escaped imprisonment and emerged to foil the plan.

Jim Cornette: "I'll Break Up The Midnight Express If They Can't Beat The Steiners!" (February) Manager Cornette, frustrated that his team couldn't beat Rick and Scott, issued the decree that caused a rift in his ranks. The Express never did beat the Steiners—and Cornette made good on his threat.

Destined For Disaster: The Fabulous Ones Reunite! (April) One of the best tag teams of the 1980s reformed to help Jerry Lawler handle the "Memphis Mafia." But Stan Lane and Steve Keirn had grown apart over the years, and the cantankerous manager Jim Cornette couldn't keep them together.

The Comeback Kid: Luger Proves He Has Guts! (April) Lex Luger was fighting the odds when he took on rugged Stan Hansen in Hansen's specialty—a bullrope match—in an attempt to regain his U.S. title. Luger earned a new measure of respect from the wrestling world—and maybe even Hansen—when he emerged victorious.



The Sheik vs. Bobo Brazil: Four Decades Of Unbridled Mayhem! (May) Since the 1960s, this pair had battled on and off with a vengence. Both men were over 60 when they met in 1991, but the match proved as bloody and hard-fought as many of its predecessors.

Bobby Eaton: "El Gigante Is For Real!" (May) Eaton had thought that the 7'7" Gigante was small in terms of heart. But after watching the big man slam Jim Garvin to the mat to seal the victory in a six-man bout, "Beautiful" Bobby was impressed. Earning Eaton's approval was a major confidence builder for the Giant, and a turning point in his career.

Only Hulk Hogan Can Rid The WWF Title Of The Stench Of Slaughter (May) Ex-patriot Sgt. Slaughter, now an Iraqi supporter, held the WWF title and it seemed Hogan was the only one who could take it away. Before long, Hogan did exactly that as he began his third WWF World title reign.

Tears Of Sadness, Tears Of Joy: The Bittersweet Reunion Of Randy Savage And Elizabeth (July) After bowing to The Ultimate Warrior in a loser-must-retire match, Savage lay on the ground in defeat as his angry valet, Sensational Sherri, began kicking him in the stomach. Elizabeth then ran into the ring and hurled Sherri away, precipitating her reconciliation with Savage after two years apart.

The Steiners vs. Sting and Luger: How Their Friendships Survived The Most Brutal Match Of The Year (September) It seemed that several friendships were destined for the scrap heap as this four-man bout at Super Brawl '91 grew more vicious with each passing minute. But Nikita Koloff burst onto the scene and beat Sting with a chain. Though Scott moved on top of Sting for the pin, the outcome was forgotten as Luger and the Steiners moved to aid the fallen Sting.

RANKING THE 25 GREATEST WRESTLERS OF THE Wrestle

At least the party was fun.

That's the best that can be said about the gala celebration of *The Wrestler's* silver anniversary, attended by the past and present members of *The Wrestler's* editorial board. The festivities lasted through Friday night and well into Saturday morning, before the owners of the catering hall almost literally shoved us out.

It was for our own goods, anyway. By 10:00 that morning, we were supposed to get down to serious business: The selection of "The 25 Greatest Wrestlers Of *The Wrestler* Years."

Just gathering the 40 past and present editors was a logistical nightmare. We didn't get them all, but we did get about 80 percent of them. And 80 percent of those came to the morning meeting with a hangover!

The original concept set forth by Associate Publisher Stu Saks was that we would have a massive discussion in which the editors would first agree on the criteria for the ratings. (That was the easy part: The ratings would be limited to male wrestlers who competed primarily in singles competition and would be based on their success and influence, regardless of ring style.) Then, as a group, we would make the selections.

"I don't know what I was thinking about," Saks admitted. "There was no chance of anybody coming to an agreement on who the 25 wrestlers in the ratings would be, let alone where they should stand in relation to one another."

The arguments raged from the very start of the meeting. Each past editor-in-chief believed he was in charge of the proceedings, which made it extremely difficult for the current editor-in-chief, Craig Peters, to maintain control. ("The hangovers didn't help one bit," Peters later said.)

While the 32 men and women bickered amongst one another, Saks and Peters caucused privately and came to the decision that the ratings would be determined by secret ballot.

On that, all agreed.

What follows on these pages are the 25 greatest wrestlers, selected by 32 of the men and women who have produced *The Wrestler* for the past 25 years. It is truly a gallery of the greatest competitors the sport has ever known.

YEARS

BRUNO SAMMARTINO

THE "LIVING LEGEND" SHINES AS BRIGHT AS EVER

Naturally, he was on the cover of the first issue of *The Wrestler*, dated October 1966. In that prized first edition, Bruno Sammartino, the reigning WWF World champion, delivered some rather startling opinions on why he was glad Lou Thesz had lost the NWA World title.

"It's no secret how I've felt about Lou since I won my own title," said Sammartino in an interview in that now-coveted premiere issue. "I'll never forgive him for not meeting me in the ring, if for no other reason than to clear up all the multi-title confusion, which has done more harm to professional wrestling than any other thing. I was willing to lay my title on the line. But, unfortunately, Lou refused to do the same thing."

It's that brutal honesty—as well as his immense talent—that made this native of Abruzzi, Italy, the most popular competitor of his time. And it was his establishing of the WWF (originally the WWWF) championship as a truly important world title that led the editors to select the "Living Legend" as the number-one wrestler in all *The Wrestler* years.

"When the WWF was first formed, the promoters weren't sure how successful the new East Coast-based federation was going to be," recalled Associate Publisher Stu Saks. "When Bruno defeated Buddy Rogers to win the title in 1963, the WWF instantly became credible—the fans respected him that much. And with the great Sammartino leading the way, the WWF quickly became a power to rival the established NWA and AWA."

The fact that Sammartino was the preeminent wrestler of the '60s and '70s only added to his legend. When he lost his title to Ivan Koloff in 1971 after 7½ years as champion, many people thought his era of dominance had ended. Sammartino proved his critics wrong by regaining the belt from Stan Stasiak in 1973 and holding the title until 1977, when he was upset by Superstar Graham.

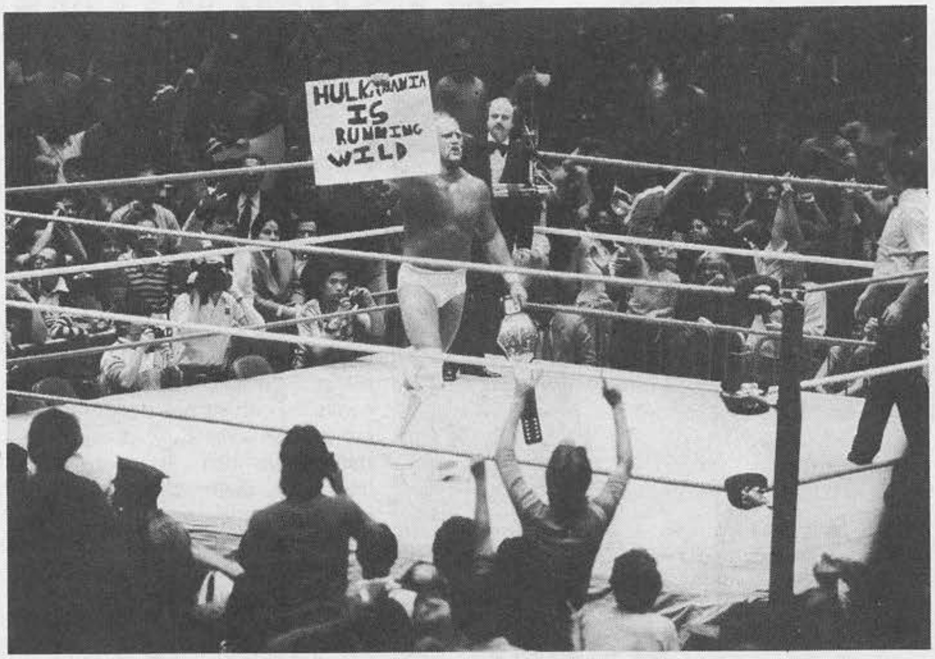
It was Sammartino's honest, straight-ahead style, however, that made him so popular. Recently, he returned to the sport as a commentator for the UWF.

"Sammartino was a great wrestler, but that's not what impresses me the most about him," marveled UWF President Herb Abrams. "We get a lot of mail every week, but the majority of it is addressed to Bruno. It's truly amazing."

Ten years after his official retirement, Bruno Sammartino remains a leader in his sport, a true champion among men.

HULK HOGAN

THE "HULKSTER" TAKES THE SPORT NATIONWIDE



When young Hulk Hogan made his WWF debut in 1979, veteran columnist Matt Brock scribbled some comments into his reporter's notebook. Those yellowed, torn sheets are still kept in *The Wrestler's* files today.

"Big, *real* big, strong, and moves well for a guy his size," Brock reported. "Hell of a legdrop. I think the guy has a chance to be a star."

Brock was right, but even the experts couldn't have predicted how far Hogan was about to go. "Hulkamania" actually began in the AWA in 1982, after the rulebreaking 6'8", 302-pounder turned good and the fans rallied to his side. But it wasn't until Hogan defeated The Iron Sheik in December 1983 that he became the sport's most influential wrestler.

Hogan's accomplishments are too numerous to list here. Three WWF World titles, several movie appearances, and unprecedented fan adulation only begin to tell his story. The fact that he remains the man to beat in the WWF—and in the sport—speak volumes for this incredible competitor.

Sometime in the future, Hogan will lose the WWF belt for the last time. But it seems unlikely that "Hulkamania" will ever die.

RIC FLAIR

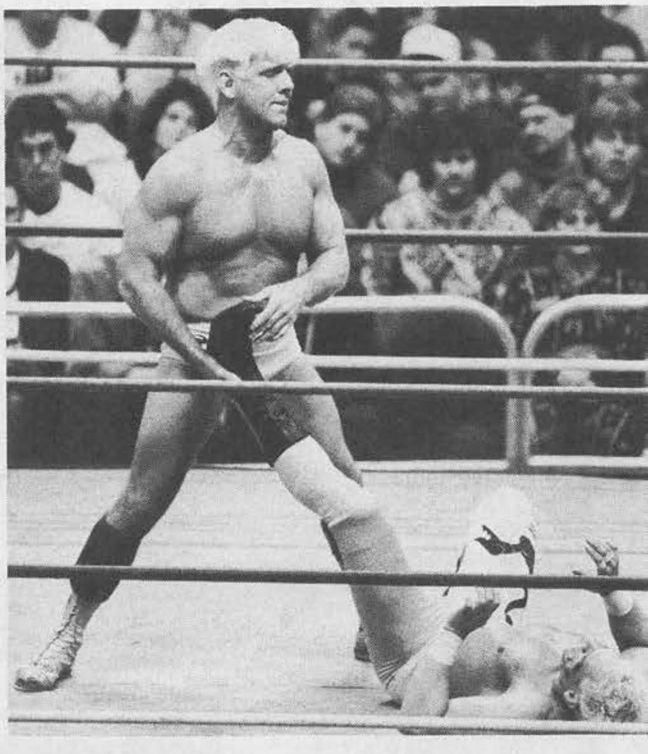
AN ALL-TIME RECORD FOR THE "NATURE BOY"

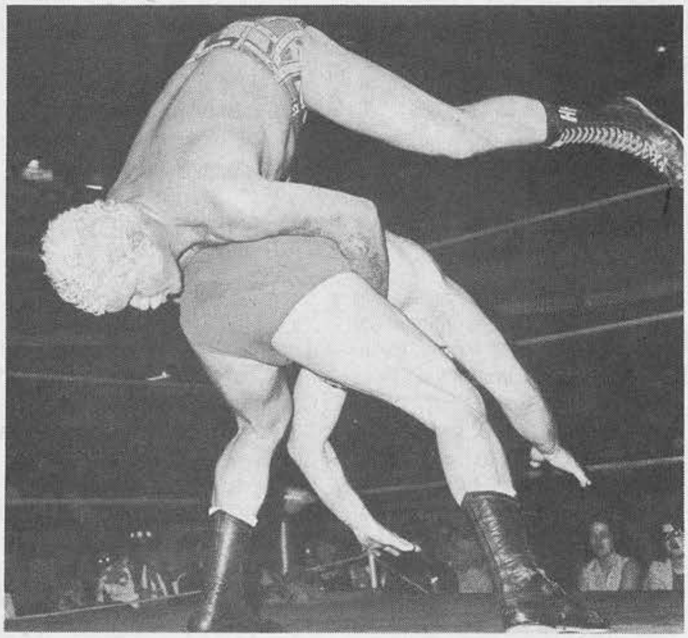
Ask a child or a casual fan who the sport's greatest wrestler is, and he'll likely answer Hulk Hogan. But ask a serious, dedicated fan the same question, and he'll probably come up with a vastly different response.

"Those are the people I care about," said seven-time WCW World champion Ric Flair. "Anybody who's got a shred of intelligence can tell I'm the greatest star of my time—maybe the finest champion ever. My record speaks for itself!"

A rulebreaker for most of his career, Flair has never been accused of being modest. However, his seven WCW World titles (tying the mark set by Harley Race) cemented the "Nature Boy's" legend forever. And a full decade after he won his first belt—from Race, ironically—Flair remains at the top of the sport.

"You *have* to despise his tactics," said Editor-in-Chief Craig Peters, "but you also have to admire Flair's skills. His figure-four leglock is the best I've ever seen. And he displays more holds and maneuvers in a single match than some wrestlers will ever learn in their entire careers. He's no huge bodybuilder, either—just an average-sized wrestler who happens to be the best in the world at what he does."





BLUE-COLLAR CHAMPION DOMINATED THE NWA

HARLEY RACE

There was a time when professional wrestlers didn't need music to go with their introductions. Grapplers simply put on their trunks and boots, walked to the ring, and gave it everything they had.

Harley Race, perhaps more than any other competitor, serves as a bridge between the time-honored days of old and today's modern, flashier style. Most WWF fans recognize Race from his stint as "The King" in the late-'80s, an image that made many of his longtime followers cringe. Before the Ric Flair era began, however, Race dominated the NWA.

A rugged brawler with vast ring skills (including a deadly piledriver), Race ended Dory Funk Jr.'s four-year NWA World title reign in 1973. When he lost the belt to Jack Brisco two months later, many experts branded Race's first title victory a fluke. Six reigns later, nobody dared dispute Race's ability.

"He wasn't flashy, but he got the job done," said Associate Editor Eddie Ellner. "He was quick, athletic, and amazingly strong for a 268-pounder—he once bodyslammed Andre the Giant! Race didn't need gaudy robes or valets. He just beat the best of the best. He was—and is—a man's man."

ANDRE THE GIANT

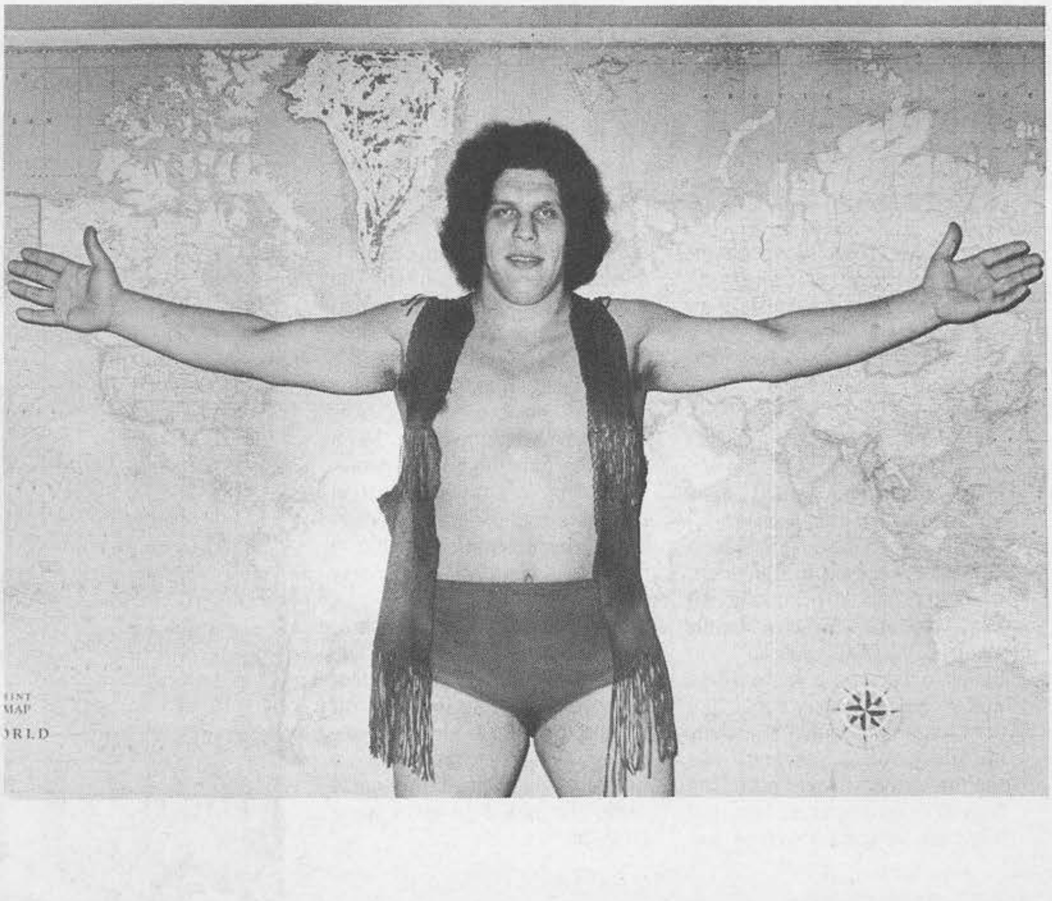
THE EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WRESTLING WORLD

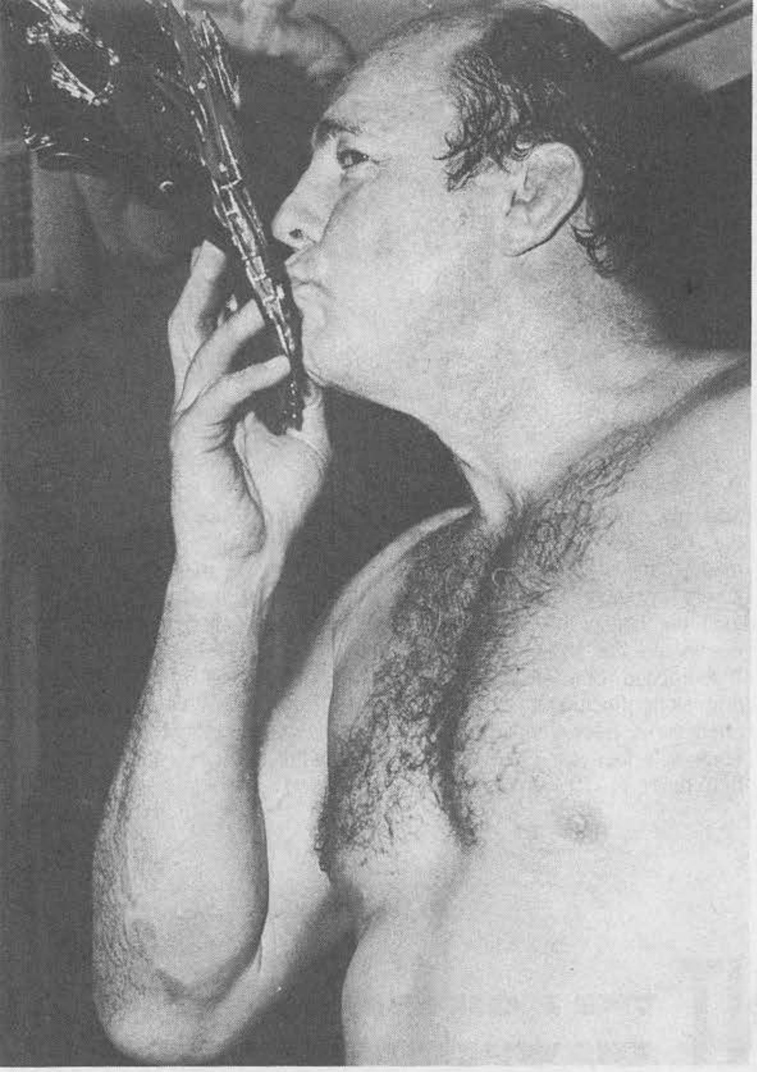
Fans who see Andre the Giant today probably wonder what all the fuss is about. After all, this aging, limping, hulking figure rarely gets in the ring anymore. Sure, he held the WWF World tag team title with Haku in 1990, but it was the Polynesian star who carried the team, not the 7'5", 497-pound Frenchman.

Go back 15 years, however, and there was no bigger star in the sport—literally and figuratively—than the man dubbed the "Eighth Wonder of the World." After his 1971 debut, a trim and amiable Andre traveled the globe and sold out arenas wherever he appeared. He was undefeated for nearly 16 years.

"The fans loved Andre because he was unbeatable," said former Associate Editor Joseph Bua. "Andre came to town and wiped out rulebreakers in a matter of minutes. Big or small, quick or powerful, Andre beat 'em all."

Andre shocked his legions of fans by becoming a rulebreaker in 1987, and he won the WWF World title from Hulk Hogan when Ted DiBiase paid off corrupt referee Earl Hebner in 1988. That's not the Andre we're honoring here. Instead, we prefer to remember the big man with the big smile who became one of the biggest stars in history.





VERNE GAGNE

TWIN CITIES SENSATION LED THE AWA TO GREATNESS

What Bruno Sammartino did for the WWF, Verne Gagne did for the AWA. The former three-time NCAA champion was named the first AWA World champion in 1960, and it was Gagne more than any other competitor who brought the AWA into prominence as one of the sport's major federations.

Gagne is generally considered to be the man who popularized the sleeperhold in the pro ranks. The Minneapolis native held the AWA World title nine times until retiring with the belt on May 10, 1981, after defeating Nick Bockwinkel in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is also the father of Greg Gagne, who continued the Gagne tradition of clean, wholly scientific wrestling into the '90s.

"That's what set Gagne apart from everyone else," recalled Contributing Editor Matt Brock. "He'd take on maulers such as Crusher or Mad Dog Vachon, but he beat those animals within the boundaries of the rulebook. Even during his later years, Gagne continued to be a force in the sport by becoming a top trainer. He helped Ric Flair, Ken Patera, and countless others get their starts. That alone qualifies him as a legend. It's quite a legacy."

Simply put, Verne Gagne was pure class. The sport could surely use a few of his kind today.

MEXICO'S GREATEST IMPORT SOARED OVER THE STATES

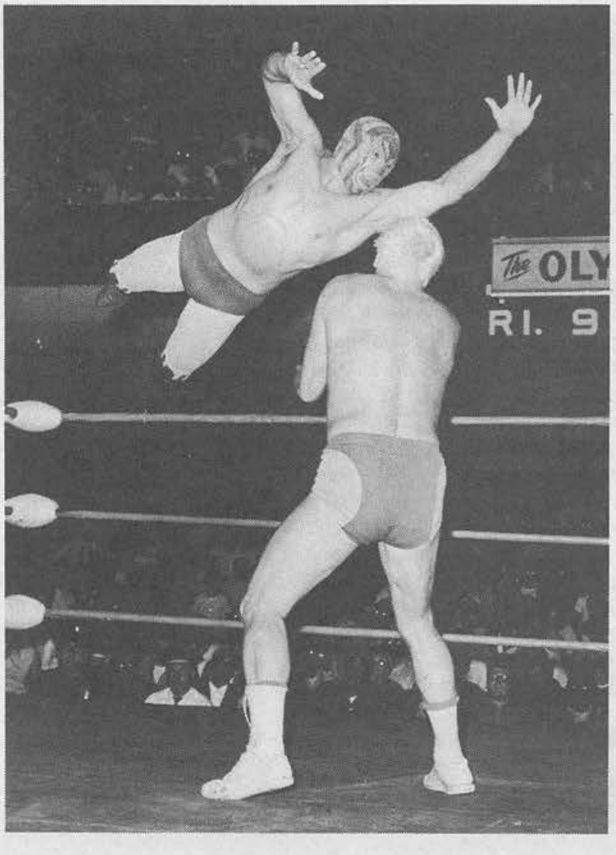
MIL MASCARAS

In 1969, NWA World champion Dory Funk Jr. called Mil Mascaras "the toughest man I've ever wrestled" after barely retaining his title in a memorable bout against the young masked sensation at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. Over the next two years, the Mil Mascaras legend would grow considerably in the U.S.

That legend began in Mexico but quickly spread to California, where the perfectly proportioned Mil Mascaras (which literally means "1,000 Masks" in Spanish) became a hero. There was an air of mystery about him than made Mascaras particularly intriguing, and Mascaras was soon in demand world over. The New York fans wanted him, but Mascaras refused to come unless the state's ban against masked wrestlers was lifted. The State Athletic Commission had no choice but to rescind its antiquated rule.

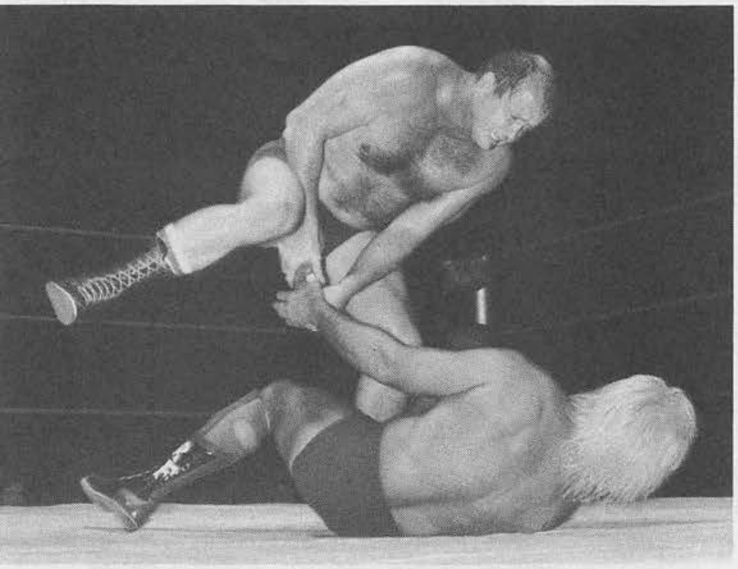
Mascaras, who has as many holds as he does masks, was named IWA champion in 1975 upon the formation of the federation. The IWA lasted less than two years, but Mascaras continues to defend that same title in his native country to this very day.

"Pound for pound, Mascaras was the greatest wrestler I've ever seen," said Senior Editor Bill Apter. "Seeing him soar off the top turnbuckle in his breathtaking flying bodypress was a sight I'll never forget. Mascaras made me proud to be a wrestling fan."



DORY FUNK JR.

THE FIRST OF AN AMAZING BROTHER ACT



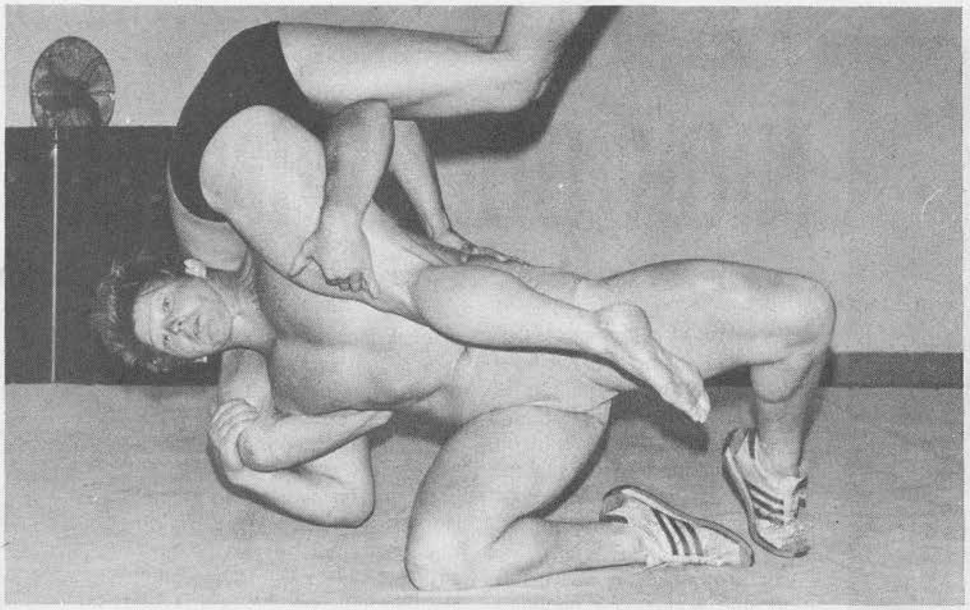
It was one of the best-selling covers in the history of *The Wrestler.*

Two decades ago, most of our covers featured four or more of the top wrestling stars of the day. For the February 1972 issue, the magazine broke with tradition and featured one full-cover shot of NWA World champion Dory Funk Jr.

Rarely in those days did a single wrestler have the star power to command such a prominent position, but Funk was quickly becoming a nationally known figure. The son of veteran Dory Funk Sr. and the older brother of Terry Funk, Dory Jr. upset Gene Kiniski for the NWA World title in 1969 and held the title for more than four years. His spinning toehold, taught to him by his father, remains among the most emulated holds ever.

"Dory never seemed to covet publicity, never goaded us to run stories on him," said Publisher Stanley Weston. "Even when he was angered, he remained soft-spoken and polite. No wonder it was such a shock when he became a rulebreaker a few years after he lost the belt to Jack Brisco in 1973."

Funk, now semiretired, has mellowed to the point where IWCCW officials named him the first commissioner of their federation. With Funk's knowledge and experience, those officials couldn't have made a better choice.



BOB BACKLUND

NONPAREIL ABILITY, UNCOMPROMISING STANDARDS

When Bob Backlund defeated Ivan Koloff at the UWF's Beach Brawl on June 9, it seemed as if the former WWF World champion had never left the sport.

Semiretired for more than five years—and making his first ring appearance in nearly three—the still-trim 242-pounder dazzled Koloff with the same amateur-derived maneuvers that led him from the NCAA Division II title at North Dakota State to the Missouri State pro title all the way to the WWF World belt.

Many fans today don't realize this, but Backlund was WWF World champion for more than five years, from 1978 through 1983. Before there was Hulk Hogan, there was Bob Backlund, confounding his opponents with his knowledge of hundreds of holds, including his finishers: the atomic spinecrusher and the chicken-wing.

"When Backlund was on his game, he was unbeatable," recalled Assistant Editor Steve Farhood. "Bob even dominated giants like Samoan Sika and John Studd. It was a huge shock when The Iron Sheik beat Backlund by submission in December 1983. Actually, it was Backlund's manager, Arnold Skaaland, who threw the towel in for him in that match. That's why many fans still call him the champion."

After seeing Backlund expertly dismantle Koloff, it's not hard to see why.

JACK BRISCO

THE "ORIGINAL" SEX SYMBOL

About two months after Jack Brisco won the NWA World title from Dory Funk Jr. in 1973, news of Brisco's triumph had finally made its way through the sports world (there was virtually no cable television in those days). At about that time, Senior Editor Bill Apter brought a huge sack of mail into the offices of *The Wrestler.*

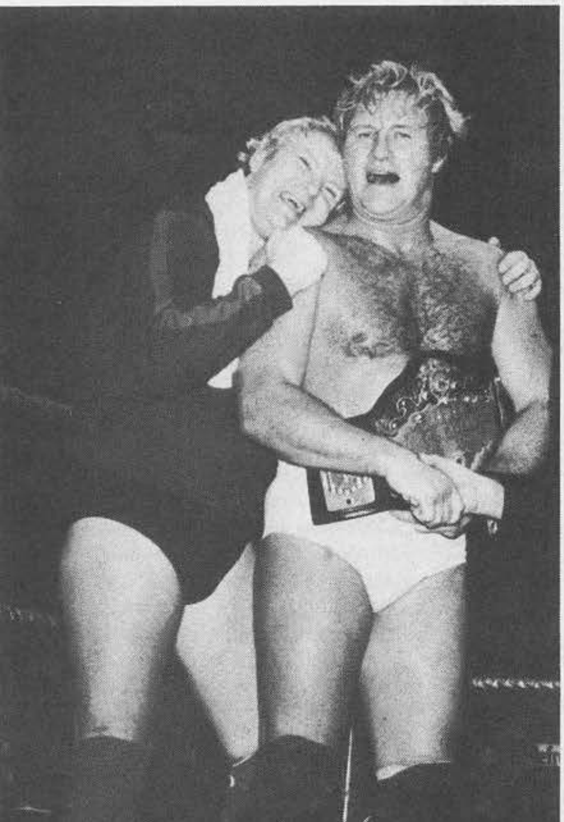
"What's that?" asked then-Managing Editor Robert Thornton. "Are we running a contest or something?"

"No way," answered Apter. "This is just part of the mail we've been getting about Jack Brisco. It seems every female fan in the country wants to know more about him since he won the title. Some guys have all the luck, eh?"

Indeed, Brisco, as former NCAA wrestling champion, was a handsome young man, but he was also blessed with a great deal of natural talent. His victory over Race was followed by classic defenses against Terry Funk, Gene Kiniski, and The Sheik, many times winning by submission with his figure-four leglock.

But he was more than a great singles competitor. After losing the belt to Funk in 1975, Brisco turned to tag teams, and he and his brother, Jerry, captured the NWA World tag team title three times.

And he remained popular with the ladies. But Brisco never seemed to notice. He was too concerned with being the finest wrestler he could be.



NICK BOCKWINKEL

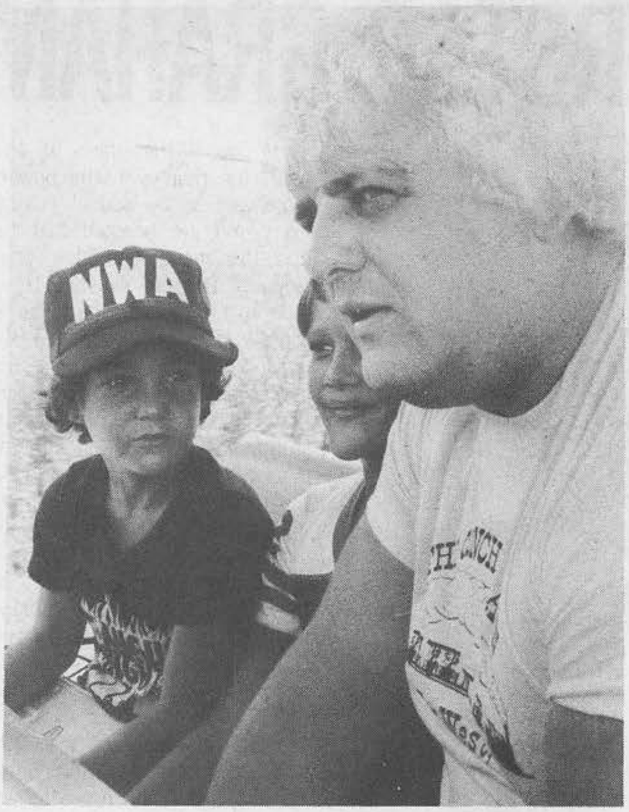
"TRICKY" NICK CARVED A BIG NICHE

For most of his career, Nick Bockwinkel earned a well-deserved place among the sport's most hated men. Arrogant and brash, "Tricky" Nick would do almost anything to win a match. Many times, his manager, Bobby "The Brain" Heenan, even did the dirty work for him.

For Bockwinkel, it was a formula that worked. He captured four AWA World titles during his illustrious 30-year career. But calling Bockwinkel a common rulebreaker would not be an accurate description of the man. You don't beat Verne Gagne and Otto Wanz by relying on foul tactics alone.

"Bockwinkel was a master ring psychologist," said Associate Editor Bob Smith. "He proved that during his last title reign, after he became a fan favorite in 1986. He took a lot of heat for accepting the belt, since he was awarded it after Stan Hansen had left an arena. He was nearly 50 years old at that point, but he was beating guys half his age. To me, his last title reign was his best. Like fine wine, Nick got better with age."

And, like fine wine, Bockwinkel has mellowed considerably in recent years. Today, he's a goodwill ambassador for the sport, representing wrestling charity events throughout Minnesota. We can't think of a better man for the job.



DUSTY RHODES

"STARDUST" LIVES OUT THE AMERICAN DREAM

It was 1974: the year that changed Dusty Rhodes forever.

For the first five years of his career, Rhodes was a hated rulebreaker, teaming with Dick Murdoch as The Texas Outlaws. After that reign of terror, Rhodes hired Gary Hart as his manager.

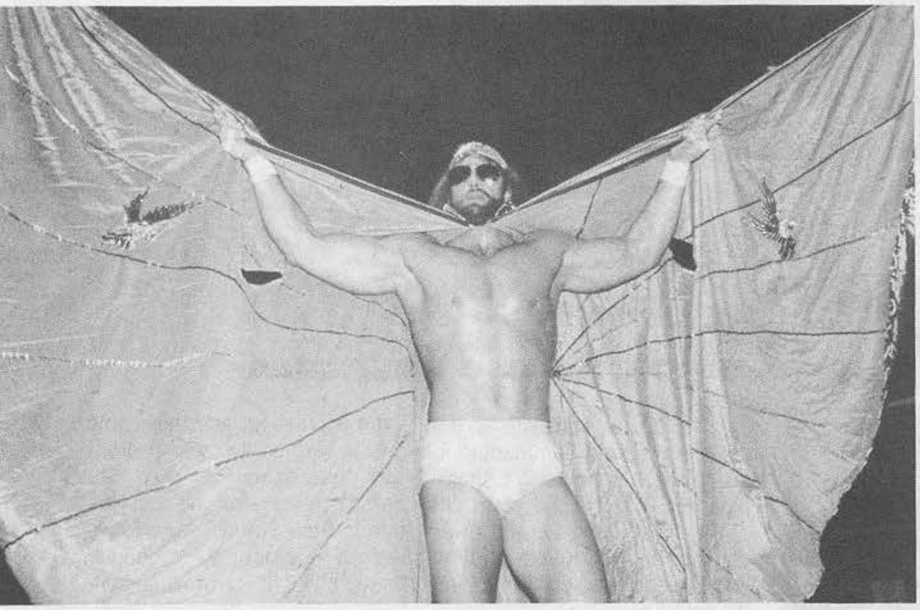
Hiring the scurrilous Hart was, ironically, the best thing Rhodes ever did. Within months, Rhodes was feuding with the manager and his former partner, Kim Duk. Suddenly, the fans rallied to the rotund Rhodes' side.

The "American Dream" was born.

Dusty enjoyed three NWA World title reigns during his 22-year career, but it was his unique relationship with the fans that made him truly special. Never blessed with speed or a huge amount of strength, Dusty engaged in brawl after bloody brawl on behalf of his "chillun'," his special name for his fans.

From Florida to Atlanta to New York, fans flocked to see the brawler with the deep Texas accent and the "bionic elbow." Today, the Rhodes legacy continues on through his son, Dustin, currently a rising star in WCW.

"For a solid decade, no one was more popular than big Dust," said Senior Editor Bill Apter. "It was always a pleasure to watch him, but it's been an even greater pleasure to know him. He truly *is* the American dream come to life."



RANDY SAVAGE

MACHO IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD

Some fans love him while others hate his every movement. Either way, "Macho Man" Randy Savage inspires passion from the fans every time he enters a ring.

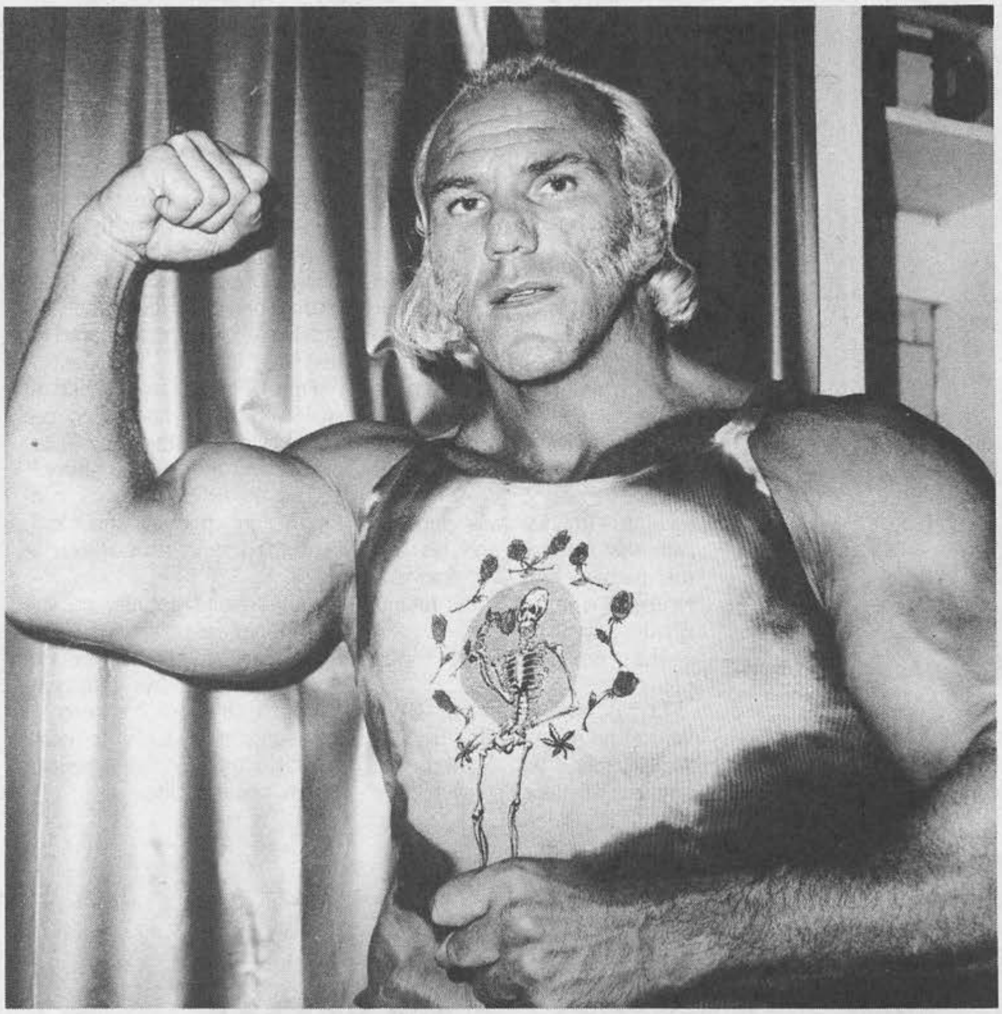
That's because of his incredible skill—and because of his gaudy "Macho" image. Few wrestlers have the sheer nerve to play "Pomp And Circumstance" as their ring music, but Savage backs up that regal theme with some of the most incredible maneuvers ever seen in pro rings.

The flying axhandle. The double fistdrop from the top turnbuckle to the floor. Fine moves. But after he complimented them with the presence of his gorgeous manager (and soon-to-be wife) Elizabeth, he became a main-event WWF star.

And a champion. After a rule-breaking stint as Intercontinental titleholder, he won the tournament to become WWF World champion at WrestleMania IV. He held the belt for one year until Hulk Hogan defeated him at WrestleMania V, but by then Savage was established as one of the sport's true superstars.

"Savage is a long way from being through, too," enthused Associate Editor Andy Rodriguez. "At times, it's hard to believe he's an 18-year veteran. He lost his loser-leaves-WWF bout to The Ultimate Warrior at WrestleMania VII, but that was just a temporary setback. He'll be back soon. He's got a great woman, two titles under his belt, and all the talent in the world. So who's more macho than that?"

THE ORIGINAL 24-INCH PYTHONS SUPERSTAR GRAHAM



He was "the man of the hour, the man with the power, too sweet to be sour." During his prime, he boasted that he had the most incredible physique of any pro wrestler.

From the moment he became a pro in 1969, "Superstar" Billy Graham stood out from his contemporaries—in more ways than one. In addition to being a loudmouthed braggart, Graham, a former bodybuilder, displayed the most incredible upper body in the sport. His biceps measured an amazing 24 inches.

Graham enjoyed success in the AWA, but his career skyrocketed after he hired The Grand Wizard as his WWF manager. The blond battler pulled off what many consider to be the greatest upset of the '70s when he pinned Bruno Sammartino (using the ropes for leverage) to win the WWF World title in 1977.

"Graham just had a way of getting under people's skin," said Associate Editor Bob Smith. "Fans who saw Graham during his later years as a fan favorite have no idea the kind of damage this wildman could cause. Few men come to the WWF and dominate, but Billy did just that."

PEDRO MORALES A BRIGHT SPOT IN THE INTERIM

The '70s was known as the decade of Bruno Sammartino in the WWF, but he wasn't champion for 10 straight years. In 1971, the "Living Legend" was defeated by Ivan Koloff, and the WWF needed someone to defeat the brutal Russian rulebreaker—and fast.

Pedro Morales came along at just the right time. Long known as a dynamic aerial specialist with a powerful left hook, the popular Puerto Rican grappler defeated Koloff just three weeks after Ivan had won the WWF title. Morales soon became an incredibly hot attraction at Madison Square Garden in New York.

"New York City has a large Latin population, and they came out in droves to see Pedro," said Associate Publisher Stu Saks. "Years after he lost the title to Stan Stasiak, Morales remained amazingly popular there. In fact, his two Intercontinental title reigns in the early-'80s—and his classic defenses against Don Muraco—practically sold out the Garden all by themselves."

Today, many fans still call Bruno the "King of the Garden." The ones who were *really* around then, however, remember that it was Pedro who helped save the WWF from the scourge of Koloff. It is an achievement that should never be forgotten.

THE SHEIK

THE FIRST MIDDLE-EASTERN TERROR

He wasn't overly big, powerful, or fast. He probably knew fewer than five actual wrestling holds. He didn't have great stamina or natural ability.

But The Sheik was clearly the most feared wrestler of the '60s and '70s. This crazed Lebanese terrorist drew more blood and caused more injuries than any other rulebreaker in wrestling history.

Among other things, Sheik (who was managed mainly by Abdullah Farouk and Eddie Creachman) used his razor-sharp teeth at will to tear apart his opponents' foreheads. If that didn't work, he'd reach into his trunks and pull out his dagger-like pencil. And if *that* didn't work, Sheik's ability to hurl flame from his fingertips had the potential to permanently disfigure his foes.

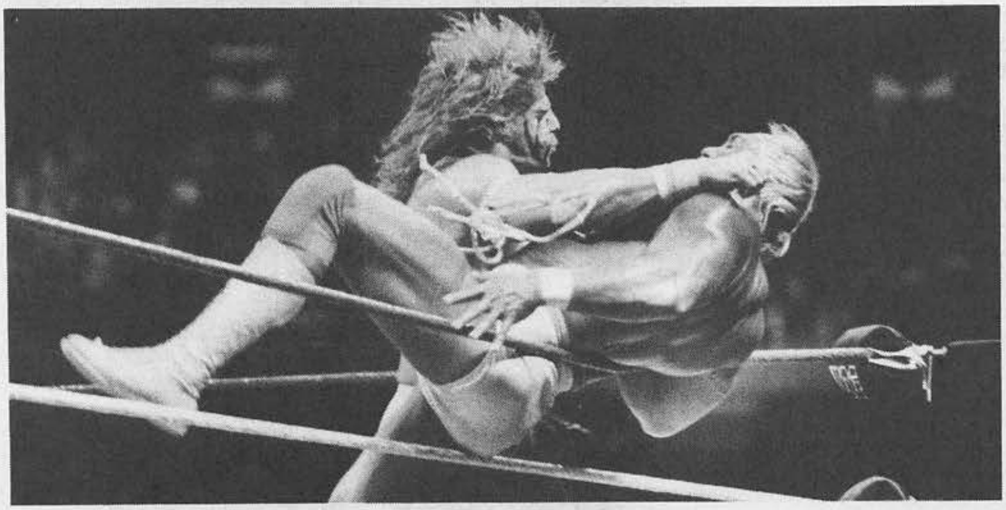
He carved up Dusty Rhodes and Mark Lewin. He battered Bobo Brazil and Jack Brisco. And he even burned referee Johnny "Red Shoes" Duggan while making a defense of his U.S. title—a championship he still claims.

"The scariest man I ever saw wrestle," said Senior Editor Bill Apter in horrified tones. "He would do anything to win his matches. He didn't care if his brutal actions put his opponent, himself, or even the fans in danger. He wasn't happy unless the mat was soaked in blood."

The Sheik still isn't satiated. Recently—at 67 years old—Sheik made a comeback against Abdullah the Butcher, and he has more matches scheduled. See them at your own risk.

THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR

THE WAR-PAINTED WWF WONDER



There may be no greater upset in the '90s. It has been compared to Ivan Koloff's victory over Bruno Sammartino for the WWF World title in 1971.

At WrestleMania VI on April 1, 1990, in Toronto, The Ultimate Warrior cleanly pinned Hulk Hogan to win the WWF World championship.

What could be a bigger victory than that? This 6'4", 280-pound powerhouse's pin of Hogan marked the first time the "Hulkster" had been cleanly pinned in in almost *nine years.* For Warrior, who was already the Intercontinental champion when he defeated Hogan, the victory made him a genuine WWF superstar.

Warrior only managed to hold the belt for 10 months before Sgt. Slaughter defeated him (with the help of Randy Savage), but the loss hasn't diminished Warrior's stature in the eyes of many fans. From his days as a member of Powerteam USA in 1985 (along with another young star named Sting) to his current domination of the WWF, Warrior's ultra-powerful gorilla-press and splash have helped him score victory after victory.

"The great thing about the Warrior is that he's just getting started," said Associate Editor Andy Rodriguez. "He doesn't have great technical skill, but he's still young, and he's learning the sport as he goes along. His best days are still ahead of him."

CHIEF JAY STRONGBOW

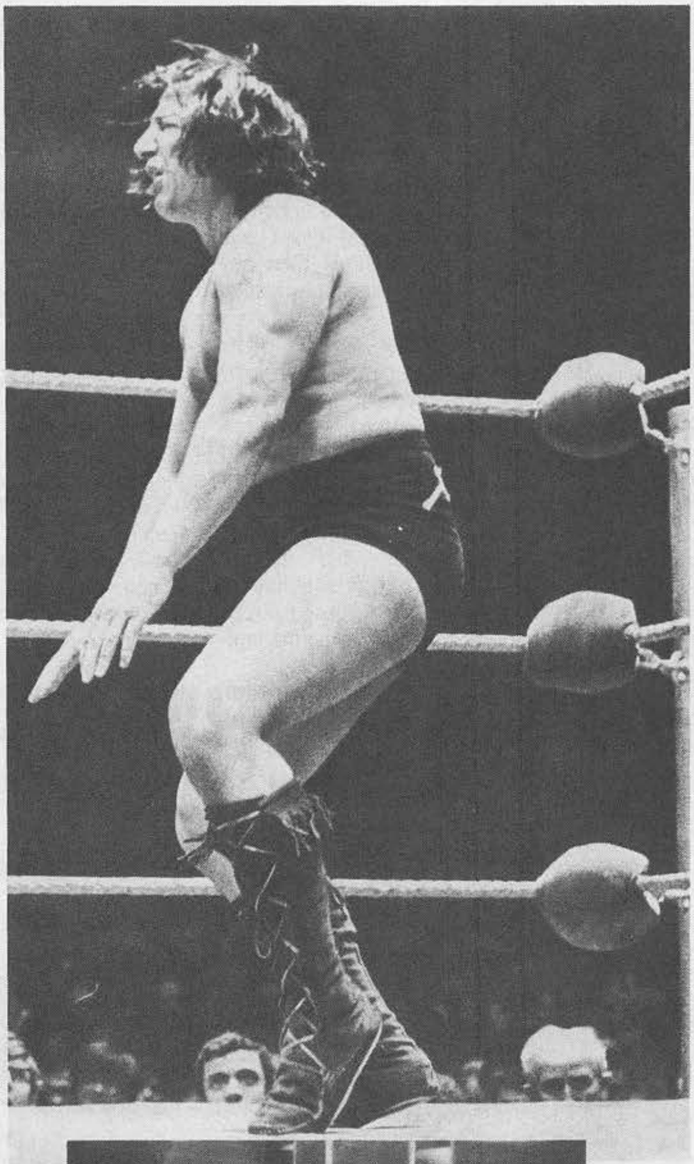
NEVER A WORLD CHAMPION, BUT A WORLD-BEATER

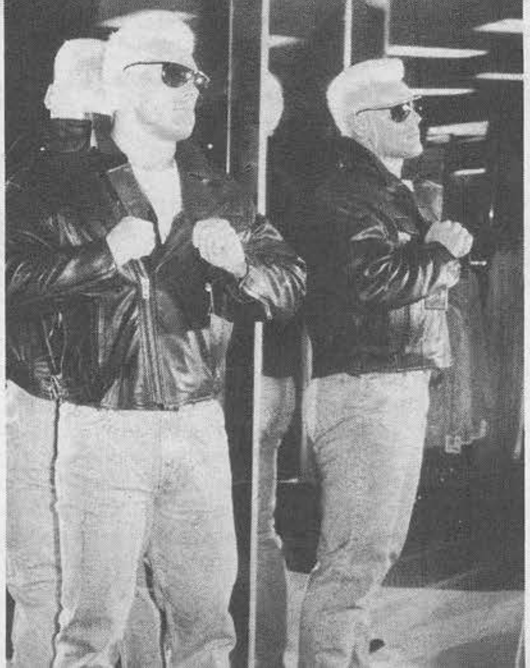
He may have been the greatest WWF star to never hold the WWF World title. But to legendary native American Chief Jay Strongbow, becoming the champion was never as important as pleasing his fans.

"I've never seen a guy go so far for those who cheered him," said Editor-in-Chief Craig Peters while remembering this star of the '70s. "Fred Blassie chewed his face to ribbons—and he came back. Greg Valentine broke his leg—and he came back. Spiros Arion broke his heart when he ripped his sacred headdress apart—and he came back. Bleed him dry, insult his heritage—none of it mattered. All that was accomplished was that you had one hot Indian on your hands."

Strongbow boasted one of the most unorthodox styles ever. He could be beaten into near-submission by his foe, but he always responded to the war whoops of his fans by going into his famous "war dance." His tomahawk chops brought him many victories, but he also boasted an excellent sleeperhold—and a remarkable move in which he would bounce off the ropes, slide between his foe's legs, rise, and blast him with chops to the chest.

Strongbow left behind an excellent record upon his 1982 retirement. He captured the WWF World tag team title four times—twice with his younger brother, Jules. He and Wahoo McDaniel have established their places in history as the greatest Indian stars of all-time.





STING

CALIFORNIA COOL LOOSE IN WCW

He's a great wrestler with incredible stamina, a wealth of technical skill, and an intense will to win. But even without those attributes, Sting would probably *still* be an immense star.

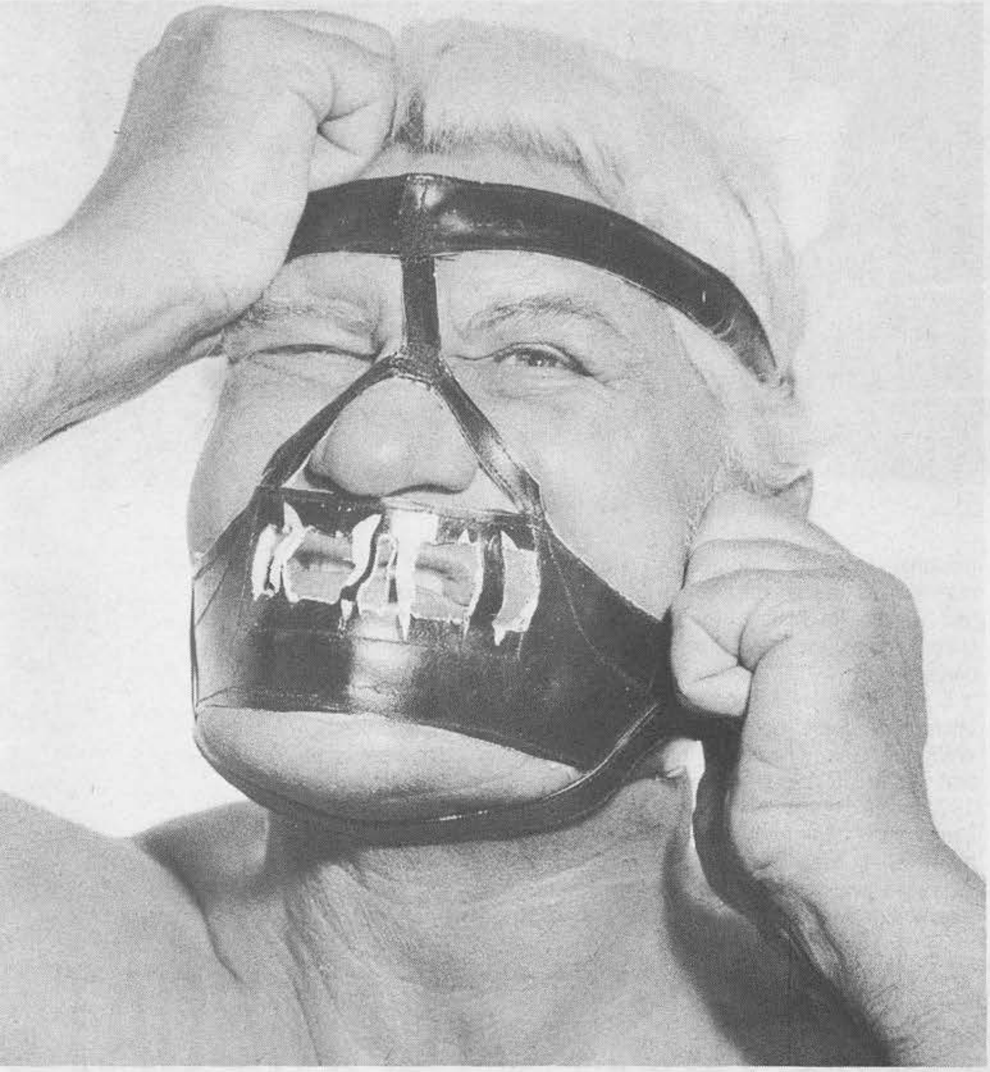
"Let's face it—the guy is just plain *fun*," said Senior Writer Dave Rosenbaum. "When he comes to the ring and lets out a war cry, he practically tears the roof off the arena all by himself. He's still a ball of youthful enthusiasm. That's amazing, considering what he's been through."

The colorful, war-painted Californian first became a star in 1987 after splitting with the then-hated Eddie Gilbert. As the UWF merged into the NWA, Sting started to gain important matches, and more often than not he won them. By 1988, he became a contender to Ric Flair's World title, and took the champion to a classic 45-minute draw at the first Clash of the Champions.

However, on February 6, 1990, Sting's meteoric four-year career nearly came to an end. He ruptured his left patella tendon, and it was feared the injury would never fully heal. But on July 7 of that year, Sting had not only made it back, but he defeated Flair to win his first World title. He lost the belt to Flair this past January, but he remains a top contender—and the fans still go wild every time he makes an appearance.

FRED BLASSIE

THE BLOOD-SOAKED FASHION PLATE OF WRESTLING



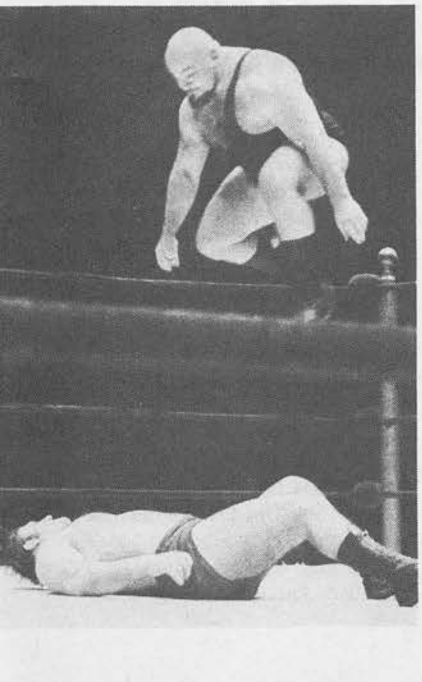
Younger fans remember Fred Blassie as the "California Fashion Plate," the gruff-yet-comical WWF manager who led Nikolai Volkoff, Stan Hansen, and other rulebreakers into action during the '70s and '80s.

Fans from the '60s and early-'70s, however, remember a much more fearsome, destructive Blassie: The "Vampire." This sadistic, blood-crazed rulebreaker was an outstanding technical wrestler, but for some reason preferred to use his teeth and fists to draw plasma from his screaming victims.

Want proof? One of the most bizarre cover photos in the history of *The Wrestler* was part of the February 1969 edition, which featured Blassie straining to remove a dog muzzle, which entirely covered his mouth. Beleaguered California promoters forced him to wear the device to keep him from sinking his teeth into his opponents' necks.

"Blassie knew that when a man feels hot blood streaming into his eyes, he's as good as gone," said former Managing Editor Robert Thornton. "Back in 1972, he became the first wrestler to be 'censored' by the WWF. His matches were so gory they put a big, red 'X' over the screen!"

Still think Blassie was funny?



IVAN KOLOFF

20 YEARS LATER, THEY *STILL* DON'T BELIEVE IT

The photo was a classic. There was Ivan Koloff in midair, about to land with a kneedrop on the supine figure of WWF World champion Bruno Sammartino. Three seconds later, Koloff scored the pin that ended Bruno's glorious 7½-year title reign.

They're *still* talking about what happened after that classic match at Madison Square Garden. When the pinfall was counted, there wasn't a sound at the fabled arena—only the soft, low sound of weeping. The 21,000 fans simply could not believe that Sammartino, the "Living Legend"—*their* legend—had been cleanly defeated.

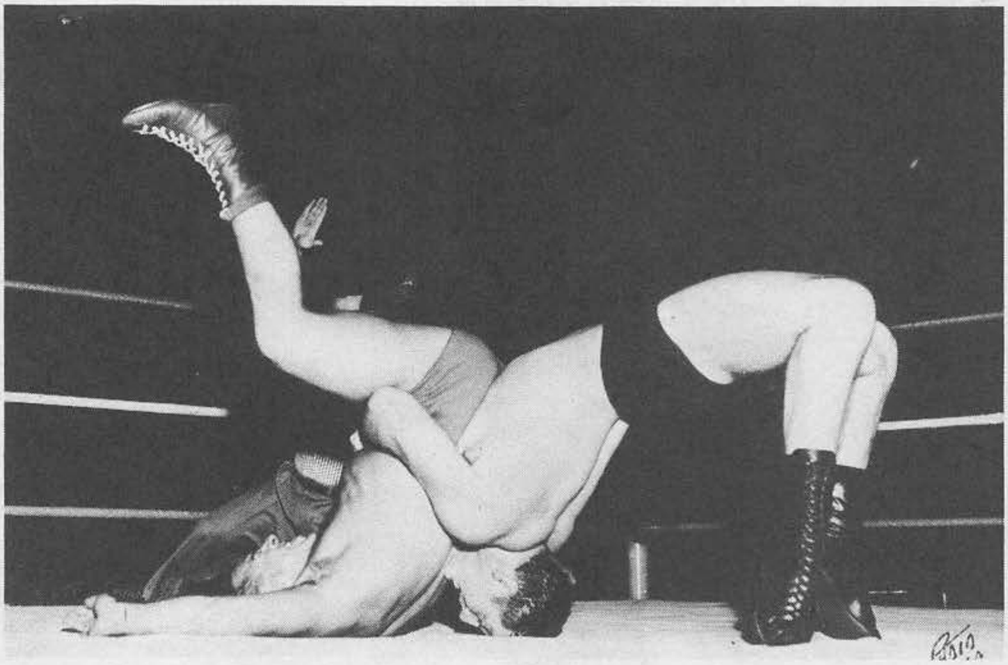
"It was among the most incredible sights I've ever seen," recalled Senior Editor Bill Apter. "They didn't even announce Koloff as champion until later on, fearing there might be a riot."

In the 20 years following that match, Koloff, a brutal brawler who's famous for his chain-swinging prematch antics, has remained a despised man. In 1984, he brought his nephew, the massive "Russian Nightmare" Nikita Koloff, into the sport. He's also held the NWA World tag team team title four times, twice with Nikita.

But ask any fan about Ivan Koloff, and invariably he'll tell you about that match—*the* match—that made this sinister Russian a legend.

KARL GOTCH

PRAISE "THE GOD OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING"

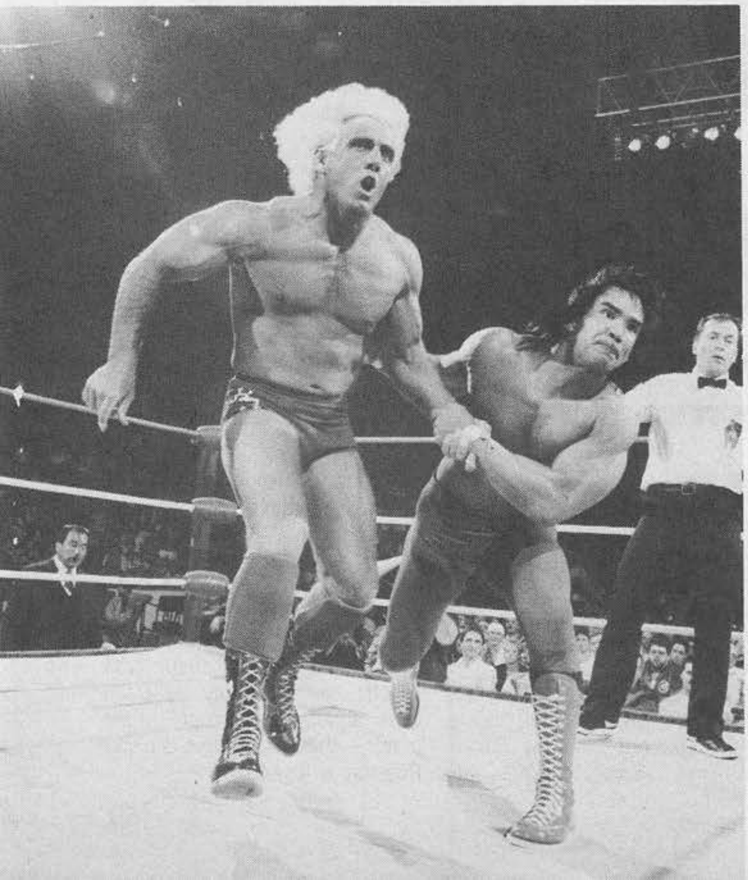


There are a lot of Japanese wrestlers who received consideration for a spot in these ratings: Antonio Inoki, Rikidozan, Tiger Mask, Tatsumi Fujinami, and Akira Maeda. If these men were asked to name the top 25 wrestlers of the past 25 years, the name at the top of their lists would undoubtedly be Karl Gotch. After all, he trained them all.

Gotch is revered in Japan. They call him "the god of professional wrestling" and recognize him as the greatest scientific wrestler in history. In the United States, meanwhile, he is barely known.

Gotch did enjoy a short stint (along with Rene Goulet) as a WWF tag team champion, but that was in late-1971 and early-1972 when he was 47 and had already spent the best years of his wrestling life in Europe and Asia. But even at that advanced age, Gotch awed U.S. fans with his ability to create never-before-seen moves and countermoves in the midst of a match.

Now training young hopefuls in Florida, Gotch eschews weight training and stresses the need to "learn, learn, learn." There are a few Japanese wrestlers who came close to our top 25 who did just that. Undoubtedly, there's a young wrestler in Florida right now who'll be considered for our top 50 in the year 2016.



RICK STEAMBOAT

THE "DRAGON" BREATHES FIRE—AND DOMINATES

It seems that at least once a year since his 1976 debut, Rick Steamboat engages in a classic match. Some wrestlers come up with a moment or two worth remembering, but "The Dragon" seems to make history every time he takes to the air.

Steamboat, the handsome Hawaiian-born scientific star, was the 1977 "Rookie of the Year." From there, he's gone on to compile an amazing record, including three of the sport's four major titles: the WCW World title (1989), the U.S. title (three times), and the WWF Intercontinental title. Only the WWF World title has eluded his grasp—and he's working on that one.

"To me, Steamboat's match against Savage at WrestleMania III in 1987 was the highlight of the '80s," said Associate Editor Andy Rodriguez. "It was two great competitors going at it unabated, and Steamboat was never better. And to think—he followed that up with his great bouts against Ric Flair over the WCW title!"

Today, Steamboat is known as "The Dragon" in the WWF, and he has the dramatic ability to blow fire. But the flames that spew from his mouth can *never* be as hot as the action he's provided fans for the last 15 years.

TERRY FUNK

TEXAS TERROR BRAWLS HIS WAY INTO HISTORY

Dory Funk Jr. and Terry Funk made history by becoming the first (and only) brothers to each win the NWA World title. Other than that, there's not a lot that's alike about the two.

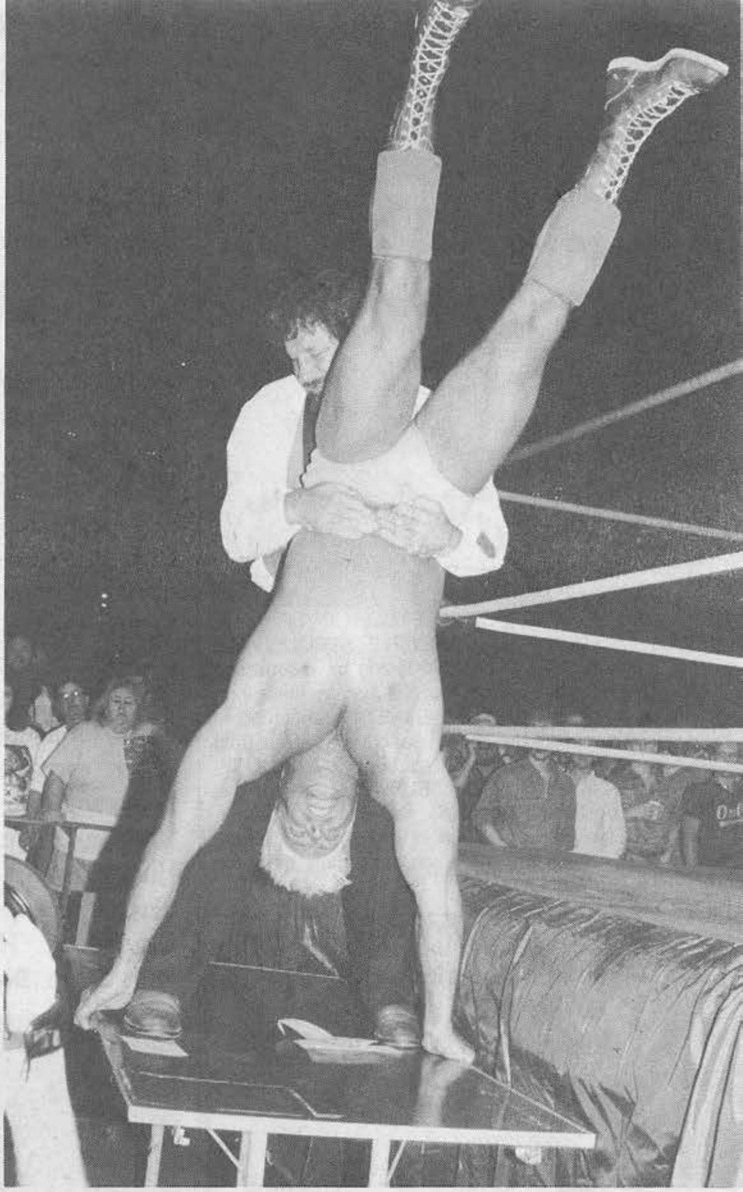
Dory prefers short haircuts, while Terry usually wears his in a long mane. Dory is soft-spoken and refined, while Terry is a tobacco-dipping screamer. Dory is a legendary scientific wrestler, while Terry is, well . . .

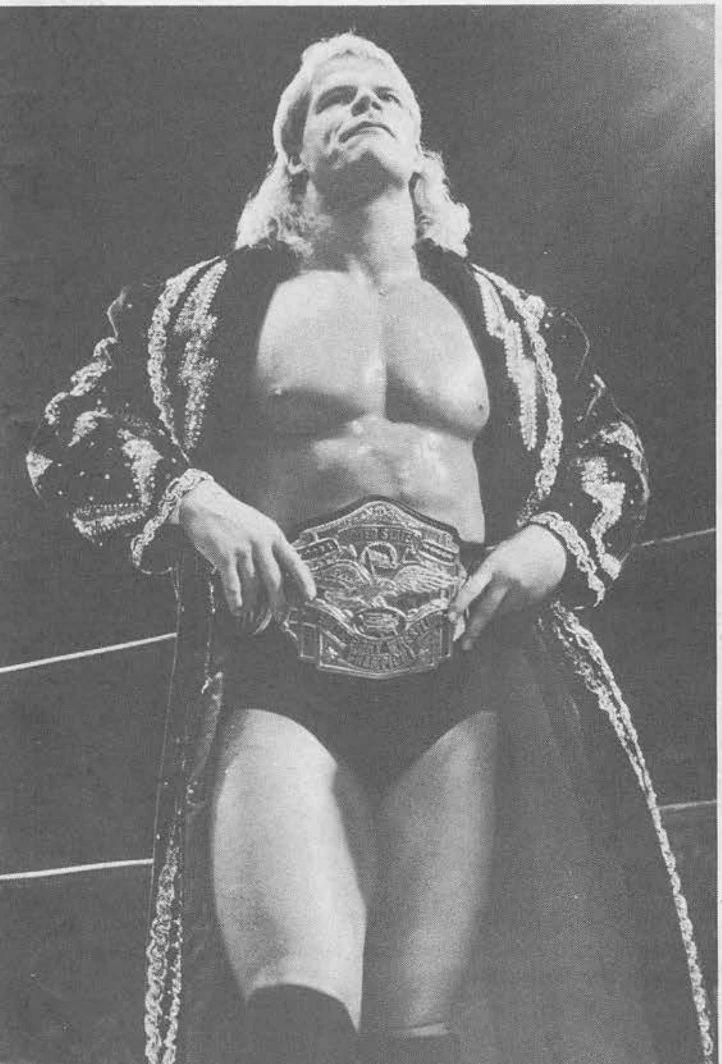
"If there's ever a hall of fame for pure brawlers, Terry Funk should be the first inductee," said Associate Editor Eddie Ellner. "Look at him today. He's obviously fortysomething, but he still sends wrestlers running for cover. He's crazy . . . like a fox. He's still a championship-caliber contender 26 years after he broke in. Amazing!"

Funk insists his longevity is due to "clean living," but he hasn't been very clean in the ring. His 1975 victory over Jack Brisco shocked NWA fans, and he used his championship to begin a campaign of unbridled violence.

But Funk is every bit as famous for his brutal surprise-attacks. His blindsided arm-breaking of Dusty Rhodes in 1979 cost the "American Dream" the NWA title. And his sucker-punch and piledriver on Ric Flair in 1989 nearly cost the "Nature Boy" his career.

Come to think of it, after all these years, there's nothing at all surprising about a Terry Funk surprise-attack.





LEX LUGER

A TOTAL PACKAGE OF GREATNESS

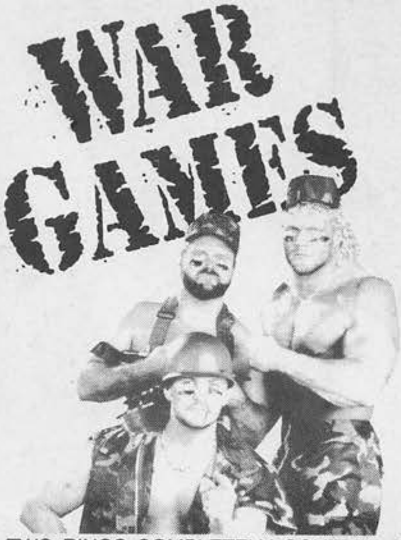
From the moment Lex Luger made his pro debut in 1985, fans knew there was something special about this muscular athlete. There had been other ex-pro football stars to enter the sport in the past, but few had been 6'5" and a perfectly proportioned 268 pounds—and even fewer could move with his kind of agility and grace.

Nineteen days after his first pro match, the Hiro Matsuda-trained rookie captured the Southern title from veteran Wahoo McDaniel. Just one year later, Luger was already receiving title matches against NWA World champion Ric Flair.

Thus far, the man fans have dubbed the "Total Package" hasn't yet captured the World title, but he's been responsible for another remarkable achievement: He's won the coveted U.S. title a record four times.

"The only reason Luger hasn't been the World champion by now is that Flair has used every trick known to man to keep that belt away from him," said Contributing Editor Kostya Kennedy. "Sure, Lex hasn't always stayed with the rulebook, but he's always come to his senses. And if he gets enough chances at Flair, he'll live up to the potential that just about everybody thinks he has."

At press time, Luger was just one "human torture rack" away from becoming the WCW World champion—and turning his potential into true greatness.



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WHAT'S HAPPENING

(Continued from page 9)

But we can't allow Rick to face those two guys on his own—that's suicide. As for the IWGP tag team title, that's for the Japanese officials to decide."

The long-awaited debut of the Global Wrestling Federation was scheduled to take place on June 28 in Dallas. The GWF will present a weekly television program on ESPN, as well as a nationally syndicated program. The ESPN show is hosted by **Joe Pedicino** and former USWA broadcaster **Craig Johnson** . . . The sport's fastest-rising superstar, Japanese sensation **Jushin Riger**, regained the IWGP junior heavyweight title from **Norio Honaga** on June 12 in Tokyo . . . Huge **Crush**, formerly of **Demolition**, is competing in the Pacific Northwest. He's been teaming with **Steve Doll** against PNW tag team champions **The Bruise Brothers**.

Which **Eric Embry** will show up today? For months, he's been among the most reviled rulebreakers anywhere, but the USWA star shocked fans in Texas by breaking away from his manager, **Tojo Yamamoto**, during the June 21 card at the Sportatorium in Dallas.

After a four-way brawl pitting USWA tag team champions **Robert Fuller** and **Jeff Jarrett** against Embry and odd newcomer **Ta-Gar**, Embry accidentally struck Yamamoto. After the skirmish, Yamamoto screamed at Embry, but Embry hit Tojo *again* and ran Yamamoto and Ta-Gar back to the dressing room. Afterward, Embry apologized to the fans for his reign of terror!

"I've been blinded by ambi-

Demolition Crush has been competing in the Pacific Northwest, teaming with Steve Doll to take on PNW tag team champions The Bruise Brothers.

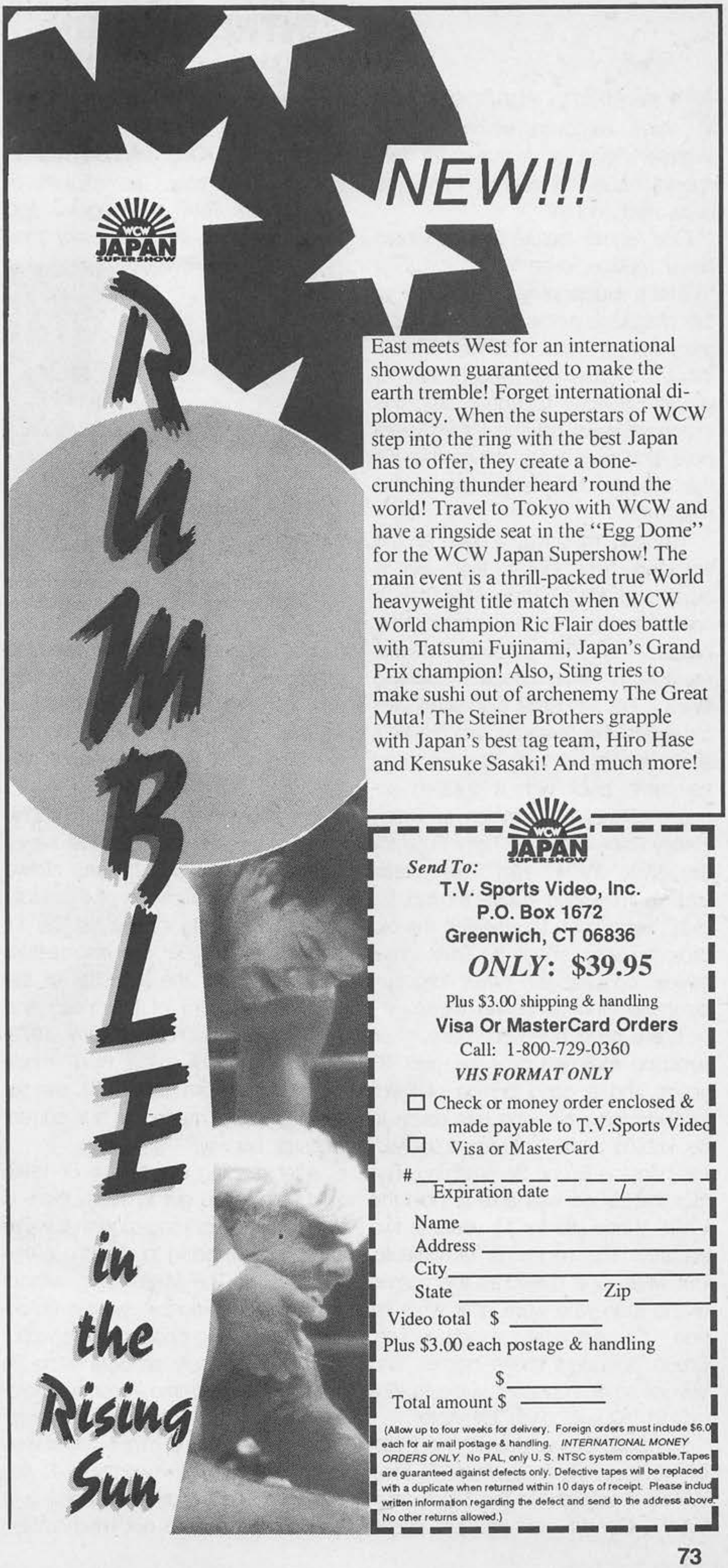
tion," said Embry, the current Southern champion. "I don't need Tojo now, and I don't think I ever really did." That's great, but what will the fans in Memphis say?

After **Brian Pillman** was forced out of WCW as a result of being pinned by **Barry Windham** in a loser-leaves-WCW match at Clash of the Champions XV, a masked newcomer named **The Yellow Dog** began taking Pillman's place in matches all over the country. Guess who the Dog's style closely resembles? . . . **Tony the Annihilator** won a tournament to become the first champion of Nu-Age Wrestling, a new Wisconsin-based federation . . . It's official: **Misty Blue Simmes** and **Allison Royal** are the "new" **Team America** in the

The LPWA's new "Team America" is Allison Royal and Misty Blue Simmes. The duo won the use of that name by defeating Heidi Lee Morgan and Comrade Orga.

LPWA. The fan favorites won the use of the name by beating **Heidi Lee Morgan** and **Comrade Orga**—but Morgan is still vowing revenge on Misty.

That's all for now. See you at the matches! □



INTRODUCTION

(Continued from page 5)

FOR SPACE PURPOSES, we have removed some of *The Wrestler's* regular features for this special issue. Of course, they'll be back next month.

One regular feature that we would never replace, even for an issue, is **"What's Happening,"** a staple of this magazine since its second issue (although it was called "Here's What's Happening, Baby!" for 10 years.) Bill Apter has been filing this important news column for 20 years now, and polls have shown that it's the readers' favorite portion of the magazine.

The only man who's been on the wrestling beat longer than Bill is crusty old Matt Brock. Matt has a special insight into the sport that he presents to *The Wrestler* readers monthly in **"Matt Brock's Looking Back."** For this issue we asked Matt to select the greatest match he's seen during the last 25 years, and he came back with a detailed account of the 1973 match in which Harley Race defeated Terry Funk for the NWA World title. This match was so imbedded in Matt's mind, he didn't even have to research the old clips to write about it. Truly great athletic contests are never forgotten by those who witnessed them.

There have been so many great wrestling matches over the past 25 years, and a good portion of them involved the man who has come to be known as the "Living Legend." His name is Bruno Sammartino. The fact that Bruno was able to hold the WWF World title for 11 years in two separate title reigns is remarkable. But when one considers the names of the men who were after what he had, it's absolutely mind-boggling. Bruno considers those names and several other important subjects in a candid **"Q & A"** with Bill Apter.

In 1966, Bruno was in the midst of his third year as WWWF (now WWF) champion. In the NWA (now WCW), Gene Kiniski had just ended the sixth and final reign of Lou Thesz, while in the AWA (now AWOL), Mad Dog Vachon was in charge. That year, the exploits of these men, their challengers, and their female counterparts saw their

When the first issue of *The Wrestler* came out, Mad Dog Vachon was AWA champion.

names in print in a national wrestling magazine for the first time. Join us now for a trip through time as we review, year by year, the sport of wrestling as it was covered on the pages of *The Wrestler.*

For each year, we have highlighted what we feel are the most newsworthy stories based on one of two criteria: the significance of that story for its time or its impact on the future. For each year, we also feature photographs of the Wrestler of the Year, Tag Team of the Year, and Match of the Year. (From 1972-1990, those selections were made by the fans; from 1966-1971, the selections were made by our current editorial board.)

After reading our review of 1980, and before you get to 1981, there is a section of this magazine that we're sure you are going to cherish. Within the files of *The Wrestler* is, without question, the most extensive collection of wrestling photos in the world. Our staff tirelessly scoured each file to select the all-time most memorable photos of *The Wrestler* years. Now these photos might not always be the most newsworthy (i.e. title changes, etc.), but look them over and tell us they're not memorable!

After the photo section, as we round out the years 1981-1991, we'd like to make a couple of points. First, as you read through the blurbs of the "Stories of the Year," the date that you see after the boldfaced headline is that of the magazine itself. Don't be confused: The events covered in the stories took place before those listed cover dates. Also, as the year 1991 is not yet over, we, of course, did not have actual selections for Wrestler, Tag Team, and Match of the Year. We indicated what what we feel are the front-runners for those honors at this point, but by no means do we want this to influence the readers when they make their actual choices on the ballot that will be provided with the January 1992 edition of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated.*

Enough about that. Back to the magazine.

The final major segment of this collector's issue rates the top 25 wrestlers of *The Wrestler* years. We're not going to get into that too deeply here because that section is preceded by its own introduction. But we to want to say that we understand (boy, do we understand!) the controversial nature of such ratings, and we urge you to let us know what you think of them.

After all, we can't even do our monthly **Official Ratings** without creating a stir. And if you have any comments on those, which along with a retrospective **Ratings Analysis**, conclude this very special issue, we'd also like to hear from you.

Let's face it: We just love to hear from you, period. We need to constantly know just what is on the minds of our readers. We value your views and try to react to your wishes. That's been the philosophy of *The Wrestler* for 25 years. We're the oldest. And that's a responsibility we take very seriously. □

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The controversial Bash tour heats up as Ric Flair & Lex Luger go at it in Baltimore. Also Rhodes vs. Windham for U.S. title; triple cage "Tower of Doom" featuring Russian Assassin I, Ivan Koloff, Perez, Rotundo, & Sullivan vs. Road Warriors, Garvins & Williams; Fantastics vs. Midnights; Blanchard & Anderson vs. Nikita Koloff & Sting.

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#2 GREAT AMERICAN BASH '89
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NWA champ Ric Flair comes back from a broken neck to wrestle former champ Terry Funk, & U.S. champ Lex Luger battles Rick Steamboat. Also: Sting vs. Muta; War Games; a battle of wits turns to a battle of fists when Paul E. Dangerously rumbles with Jim Cornette; plus much more!

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Sting, back in action in a wrestling revolution as the greatest stars from the NWA battle the new young aggressors! Sting in a great comeback against Ric Flair for the championship. Also: Doom vs. Rock 'n Roll Express, Mean Mark vs. Lex Luger, Southern Boys, etc.

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The NWA's greatest wrestlers converge in Washington D.C., for a Congress of Capital Combat! Sting vs. Robocop make a special appearance to watch six-time champ Ric Flair & Lex Luger in a steel cage for the Championship. Aso: The Steiners vs. Doom; Fly'n Brian & Z-Man vs. Midnight Express, Rock 'n Roll's etc.

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A brutal night of devilish destruction! Ric Flair wants to permanately settle the score against Terry Funk. Together with Flair's powerhouse partner, Sting, the two great heavyweight pros treat Funk & The Great Muta to some monstrous portions of punishment! Also: Lex Luger, Thr Road Warriors, The Samoan Swat Team, The Skyscrapers, The Freebirds and many more!

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#6 HALLOWEEN HAVOC '90
TERROR RULES THE RING

In a terrorizing bout, Sting defends his title against Sid Vicious. Ric Flair teams up with Arn Anderson to attemp to dethrone Doom for the World Tag Team title. Lex Luger & Stan Hansen pound each other for the U.S. Championship title. In a destructive match for the U.S. Tag Team title: Steiner Brothers vs. Nasty Boys!

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Sting vs. The Black Scorpion! Who will prove victorious in the first ever Tag Team Championship of the Universe, featuring Tag Teams from around the globe going to a face to face in a tournament of universal impact! Can Lex Luger hold on to the U.S. heavyweight belt when he battle Stan Hansen? Also: Doom vs. Ric Flair &Arn Anderson.

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Pro wrestling the way it was! Buddy "Nature boy" Rogers vs. Pat O'Connor in the 1961 classic bout. Antonino Rocca & Miguel Perez vs. Skull Murphy & Karl Von Hess. June Byers vs. Betty Hawkins. Dick the Bruiser vs. Pepper Gomez & more!

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The Fabulous Kangaroos vs Moose Cholak & Mighty Atlas, Bruno Sammartino vs. Hans Schmidt, Dr. Jerry & Eddie Graham vs. Antonino Rocca & Miguel Perez, Skull Murphy & Brute Bernard vs. The Bavarian Boys, Bobo Brazil vs. Ski Hi Lee.

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THE Wrestler

TOP 10

1 **HULK HOGAN**
292, Venice Beach, CA
(2) WWF World champion

2 **RIC FLAIR**
243, Minneapolis, MN
(1) WCW World champion

3 **LEX LUGER**
290, Chicago, IL
(3) WCW U.S. champion

4 **CURT HENNIG**
235, Minneapolis, MN
(4) WWF Intercontinental champion

5 **STING**
260, Venice Beach, CA
(5) No. 2 contender: WCW title

6 **NIKITA KOLOFF**
275, Lithuania
(6) No. 1 contender: U.S. title

7 **JERRY LAWLER**
234, Memphis, TN
(-) USWA champion

8 **BOBBY EATON**
233, Huntsville, AL
(7) No. 3 contender: WCW title

9 **SGT. SLAUGHTER**
310, Parris Island, SC
(9) No. 2 contender: WWF title

10 **ERIC EMBRY**
240, Lexington, KY
(10) USWA Southern champion

Lex Luger

TAG TEAMS

1 **THE NASTY BOYS**
Combined weight: 585 pounds
(2) WWF World tag team champions

2 **THE FREEBIRDS**
Combined weight: 490 pounds
(4) WCW U.S. tag team champions

3 **ROBERT FULLER & JEFF JARRETT**
Combined weight: 457 pounds
(6) USWA tag team champions

4 **THE BUSHWHACKERS**
Combined weight: 542 pounds
(10) No. 1 contenders: WWF tag team title

5 **THE ORIENT EXPRESS**
Combined weight: 461 pounds
(-) No. 2 contenders: WWF tag team title

6 **THE BRUISE BROTHERS**
Combined weight: 541 pounds
(8) Pacific Northwest tag team champions

7 **THE YOUNG PISTOLS**
Combined weight: 451 pounds
(7) No. 1 contenders: U.S. tag team title

8 **DICK MURDOCH & DICK SLATER**
Combined weight: 515 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: WCW tag team title

9 **HIRO HASE & MASA CHONO**
Combined weight: 504 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: IWGP tag team title

10 **EDDIE & DOUG GILBERT**
Combined weight: 452 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: USWA tag team title

WCW

World Champion:
RIC FLAIR
(C) 243, Minneapolis, MN

1—**LEX LUGER** *(1) 290, Chicago, IL*
2—**STING** *(2) 260, Venice Beach, CA*
3—**NIKITA KOLOFF** *(3) 275, Lithuania*
4—**BOBBY EATON** *(4) 233, Huntsville, AL*
5—**STEVE AUSTIN** *(-) 241, Dallas, TX*
6—**BARRY WINDHAM** *(9) 263, Sweetwater, TX*
7—**DIAMOND STUDD** *(-) 290, parts unknown*
8—**DAN SPIVEY** *(-) 300, Tampa, FL*
9—**DUSTIN RHODES** *(6) 254, Austin, TX*
10—**P.N. NEWS** *(-) 402, Detroit, MI*

WWF

World Champion:
HULK HOGAN
(C) 292, Venice Beach, CA

1—**CURT HENNIG** *(1) 235, Minneapolis, MN*
2—**SGT. SLAUGHTER** *(2) 310, Parris Island, SC*
3—**THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR** *(3) 280, Queens, NY*
4—**THE UNDERTAKER** *(5) 320, Dallas, TX*
5—**BRET HART** *(-) 235, Calgary, Alberta*
6—**THE MOUNTIE** *(8) 232, Montreal, Quebec*
7—**DAVEY BOY SMITH** *(4) 245, Leeds, England*
8—**JAKE ROBERTS** *(6) 246, Stone Mountain, GA*
9—**THE WARLORD** *(-) 360, Chicago, IL*
10—**BERZERKER** *(-) 316, Bozeman, MT*

USWA

USWA Champion:
JERRY LAWLER
(C) 234, Memphis, TN

1—**ERIC EMBRY** *(1) 240, Lexington, KY*
2—**TOM PRICHARD** *(5) 220, Houston, TX*
3—**JEFF JARRETT** *(8) 200, Hendersonville, TN*
4—**TONY ANTHONY** *(4) 235, Bucksnort, TN*
5—**BILL DUNDEE** *(2) 214, Melbourne, Aus.*
6—**DAN DAVIS** *(-) 238, Nashville, TN*
7—**ROBERT FULLER** *(-) 257, Dyresburg, TN*
8—**TEXAS RANGER** *(-) 280, parts unknown*
9—**LEATHERFACE** *(-) 288, parts unknown*
10—**EDDIE GILBERT** *(3) 222, Lexington, TN*

PNW

PNW Champion:
STEVE DOLL
(C) 237, Dallas, TX

1—**CRUSH** *(-) 310, parts unknown*
2—**JIMMY JACK FUNK** *(9) 243, Portland, OR*
3—**DOUG MASTERS** *(3) 230, Tulsa, OK*
4—**C.W. BERGSTROM** *(-) 250, Portland, OR*
5—**LARRY OLIVER** *(2) 260, Tampa, FL*
6—**MIKE WINNER** *(5) 238, Virginia City, VA*
7—**STEVE SAWYER** *(4) 222, Kansas City, MO*
8—**THE GRAPPLER** *(1) 280, parts unknown*
9—**AL MADRIL** *(6) 231, Los Angeles, CA*
10—**THE EQUALIZER** *(7) 250, parts unknown*

OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. Most Popular and Most Hated ratings are based on nationwide telephone and arena surveys of wrestling fans and on the volume and character of mail that comes to our offices. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue, while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

MOST POPULAR

1 **HULK HOGAN**
292, Venice Beach, CA
Last issue: No. 1 Most Popular

2 **LEX LUGER**
290, Chicago, IL
Last issue: No. 2 Most Popular

3 **STING**
260, Venice Beach, CA
Last issue: No. 3 Most Popular

4 **SCOTT STEINER**
235, Bay City, MI
Last issue: No. 4 Most Popular

5 **JERRY LAWLER**
234, Memphis, TN
Last issue: No. 8 Most Popular

6 **RICK STEINER**
248, Detroit, MI
Last issue: No. 7 Most Popular

7 **THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR**
280, Queens, NY
Last issue: No. 6 Most Popular

8 **BOBBY EATON**
233, Huntsville, AL
Last issue: No. 10 Most Popular

9 **EL GIGANTE**
435, Argentina
Last issue: No. 5 Most Popular

10 **SID JUSTICE**
318, West Memphis, AR
Last issue: unrated

MOST HATED

1 **NIKITA KOLOFF**
275, Lithuania
Last issue: No. 1 Most Hated

2 **EARTHQUAKE**
462, Surrey, BC
Last issue: No. 3 Most Hated

3 **THE UNDERTAKER**
320, Dallas, TX
Last issue: No. 2 Most Hated

4 **RIC FLAIR**
243, Minneapolis, MN
Last issue: No. 4 Most Hated

5 **CURT HENNIG**
235, Minneapolis, MN
Last issue: No. 7 Most Hated

6 **SGT. SLAUGHTER**
310, Parris Island, SC
Last issue: No. 5 Most Hated

7 **RICK MORTON**
228, Memphis, TN
Last issue: unrated

8 **TYPHOON**
407, Pittsburgh, PA
Last issue: unrated

9 **STEVE AUSTIN**
241, Dallas, TX
Last issue: unrated

10 **THE GRAPPLER**
280, parts unknown
Last issue: unrated

UWF

UWF TV Champion:
STEVE WILLIAMS
(1) 265, Norman, OK

1—BAM BAM BIGELOW
(2) 368, Mt. Laurel, NJ
2—TERRY GORDY
(3) 289, Chattanooga, TN
3—PAUL ORNDORFF
(-) 253, Brandon, FL
4—JOHNNY ACE
(-) 250, San Bernadino, CA
5—BOB ORTON
(7) 245, Kansas City, KS
6—STEVE RAY
(4) 255, Leavenworth, KS
7—SUNNY BEACH
(-) 270, Santa Monica, CA
8—CACTUS JACK
(-) 277, Truth Or Cons., NM
9—IVAN KOLOFF
(-) 249, Moscow, Russia
10—BORIS ZUKHOV
(-) 254, Leningrad, Russia

IWCCW

IWCCW Champion:
NONE
To be determined

1—TONY ATLAS
(1) 247, Roanoke, VA
2—KEVIN VON ERICH
(2) 235, Denton, TX
3—TASMANIAC
(3) 245, Tasmania
4—TITO SANTANA
(-) 245, Tocula, Mexico
5—MONDO KLEEN
(7) 270, Jilin, China
6—ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER
(-) 360, Khartoum, Sudan
7—JOE SAVOLDI
(9) 220, Parsippany, NJ
8—RAY ODYSSEY
(4) 205, Palm Beach, FL
9—SCOTT PUTSKI
(8) 235, Austin, TX
10—CURLY MOE
(10) 555, Mudville, OH

For period ended June 28, 1991

CUMULATIVE RATINGS

These ratings are based on the past 10 issues of this magazine. We have examined our ratings for each of those issues—in our Top 10 and Tag Team categories only—and assigned each position a point value: 10 points for a number-one rating, nine for a number-two ranking, and so on down to one point for a number-10 rating. The point values for all wrestlers in the past 10 issues have been compiled, allowing a maximum of 100 points. Each issue we'll present the top five finishers in each category. While our regular ratings reflect the past month, these cumulative ratings give an indication of wider trends in the sport.

SINGLES

1—STING ....76 points
2—LEX LUGER ....71 points
3—RIC FLAIR ....67 points
4—CURT HENNIG ....65 points
5—HULK HOGAN ....59 points

TAG TEAMS

1—RICK & SCOTT STEINER ....80 points
2—THE HART FOUNDATION ....59 points
3—THE NASTY BOYS ....52 points
4—THE LEGION OF DOOM ....51 points
5—DOOM ....48 points

GEORGIA: Georgia All-Star champion—Joel Deaton; **1**—Billy Black; **2**—Chris Walker; **3**—Fabian; **4**—Curtis Thompson; **5**—Festus; **6**—Jon Michaels; **7**—Big Bully Busick; **8**—Mad Dog Joe; **9**—Mike Cervich; **10**—Randy Rose.

IWA: IWA champion—Manny Fernandez; **1**—Preston Steele; **2**—Jules Strongbow; **3**—Derrick Dukes; **4**—Thunderfoot I; **5**—Thunderfoot II; **6**—Larry Cameron; **7**—Rikki Nelson; **8**—Bob Orton; **9**—Col. DeBeers; **10**—Hillbilly Cousin Luke.

LPWA: LPWA champion—Lady X; **1**—Reggie Bennett; **2**—Terri Power; **3**—Susan Sexton; **4**—Bambi; **5**—Madusa Miceli; **6**—Misty Blue Simmes; **7**—Denise Storm; **8**—Heidi Lee Morgan; **9**—The Beast; **10**—Magnificent Mimi.

PWA: PWA champion—Charlie Norris; **1**—Larry Cameron; **2**—Ken Patera; **3**—Teijho Khan; **4**—Ricky Rice; **5**—Tommy Ferrara; **6**—Lightning Kid; **7**—Jerry Lynn; **8**—The Punisher; **9**—Bill Irwin; **10**—Tommy Jammer.

SAPW: SAPW champion—Vince Torelli; **1**—Chris Chavis; **2**—Ron Garvin; **3**—Curtis Thompson; **4**—Paul Jones; **5**—Frank Dusek; **6**—Stan Lane; **7**—Bob Emery; **8**—Storm Trooper; **9**—Butch Malone; **10**—Tommy Seabolt.

TRI-STATE: Tri-State champion—D.C. Drake; **1**—J.T. Smith; **2**—Tony Stetson; **3**—Larry Winters; **4**—Johnny Hot Body; **5**—Cactus Jack; **6**—Rockin' Rebel; **7**—Jimmy Jannetty; **8**—C.N. Redd; **9**—Mr. Sandman; **10**—Cry Baby Waldo.

WWC: WWC champion—Carlos Colon; **1**—Polynesian Prince; **2**—Dino Bravo; **3**—King Kong; **4**—TNT; **5**—Invader I; **6**—Abdullah the Butcher; **7**—Rod Price; **8**—Giant Warrior; **9**—Dick Murdoch; **10**—Ron Garvin.

RATINGS ANALYSIS

Every month, this column will tell fans how we go about rating over 200 wrestlers in 20 different categories. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the most important—and respected—ratings system in the sport. This column is vital reading for all wrestling fans.

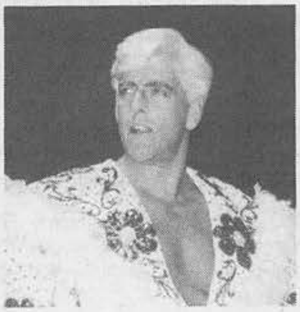
The Wrestler Top 10. In keeping with the rest of this very special 25th anniversary issue of *The Wrestler*, we'll devote this month's "Analysis" to ranking the overall Top 10 in both the singles and tag team categories.

First, a word of explanation: These rankings were compiled by going back to the August 1983 issue, which was the first edition to include Top 10 and Top 10 tag team rankings.

We've compiled point totals for the men in the top five in each issue right up to the issue you're holding in your hands. The top-rated wrestler for each month received five points, number-two got four points, and on down to one point for a fifth-place finish. The top 10 finishers in both categories are listed here. After each wrestler's name is the total number of points he's accumulated since August 1983.

SINGLES TOP 10

1—RIC FLAIR (332)
2—HULK HOGAN (262)
3—LEX LUGER (100)
3—RANDY SAVAGE (100)
5—DUSTY RHODES (68)
5—ANDRE THE GIANT (68)
7—RICK MARTEL (67)
8—STING (48)
9—NIKITA KOLOFF (39)
10—HARLEY RACE (37)



Ric Flair

Analysis: The "Nature Boy" dominated the number-one position in the early part of the '80s and has topped the rankings recently as well ... The "Hulkster's" frequent stints away from the sport decreased his point total, but he was still far and away the top WWF star ... The "Total Package's" four U.S. title reigns helped him finish high ... The "Macho Man" and "American Dream" both enjoyed world title reigns ... Andre dominated the ratings from 1983 through 1985 ... Other top finishers included: Jerry Lawler (32), Rick Steamboat (31), Curt Hennig (27).

TAG TEAM TOP 10

1—LEGION OF DOOM (333)
2—DEMOLITION (114)
3—MIDNIGHT EXPRESS (92)
4—RICK & SCOTT STEINER (86)
5—ROCK 'N' ROLL EXPRESS (78)
6—HART FOUNDATION (68)
7—BLANCHARD & ANDERSON (63)
8—DOOM (41)
9—FREEBIRDS (35)
10—BRITISH BULLDOGS (33)

The Legion of Doom

Analysis: Animal and Hawk made their ratings debut in 1983, and never left for long. They've been WCW and AWA World tag champs ... Demolition stands for Ax and Smash, but not Crush. The "original" pairing held three WWF tag titles ... Both Midnight Express duos are counted here (Bobby Eaton and Dennis Condrey, Eaton and Stan Lane), as are both sets of Freebirds (Michael Hayes and Terry Gordy, Hayes and Jim Garvin) ... Ron Simmons and Butch Reed seemed to be on their way to greatness before their breakup ... Also sorely missed are the Foundation and the Bulldogs ... Other top finishers include: Patera & Blackwell (32), Briscos (30), Koloffs (25).

Thinning rankings. The injury bug hit our tag team ratings in a big way this issue. Last month's top team, WCW World champions **Rick** and **Scott Steiner**, have been forced out of action after Scott suffered a torn left bicep in June. Likewise, the WWF's top team, **The Legion Of Doom**, was grounded when **Hawk** underwent surgery to correct a herniated disk the same month. Naturally, both teams are out of the rankings, which moves WWF World tag team champions **The Nasty Boys** up to the number-one position, the first time they've held that slot.

That's all, folks! Care to comment on our special *Wrestler* ratings? Have a question or complaint about our other ratings? Rush your mail to: "Ratings Analysis," c/o *The Wrestler*, Box 48, Rockville Centre, NY 11571. □

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—*K.R., Milwaukee*

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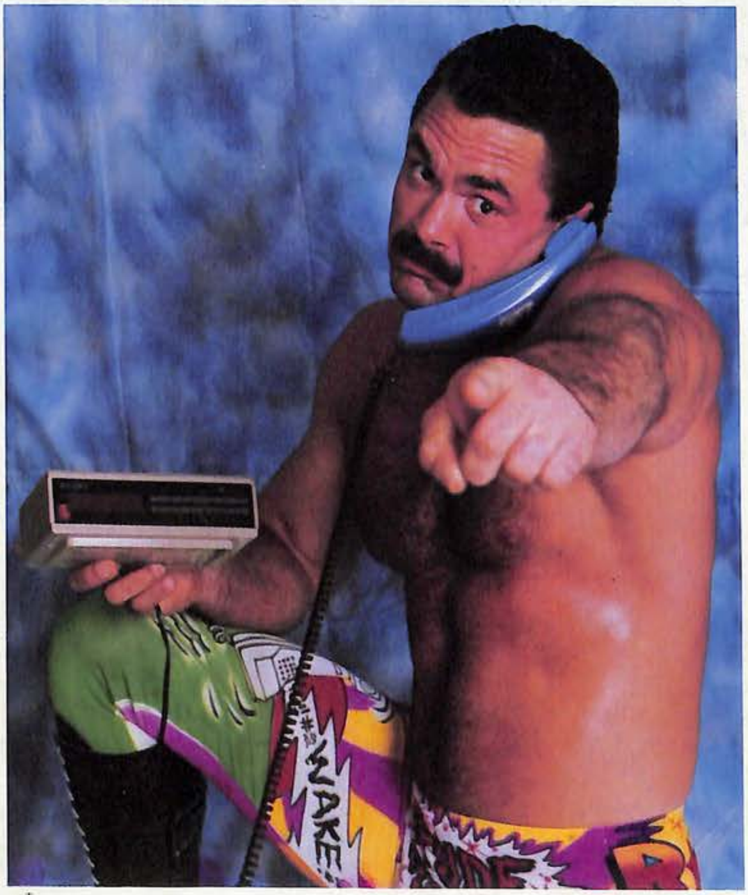

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